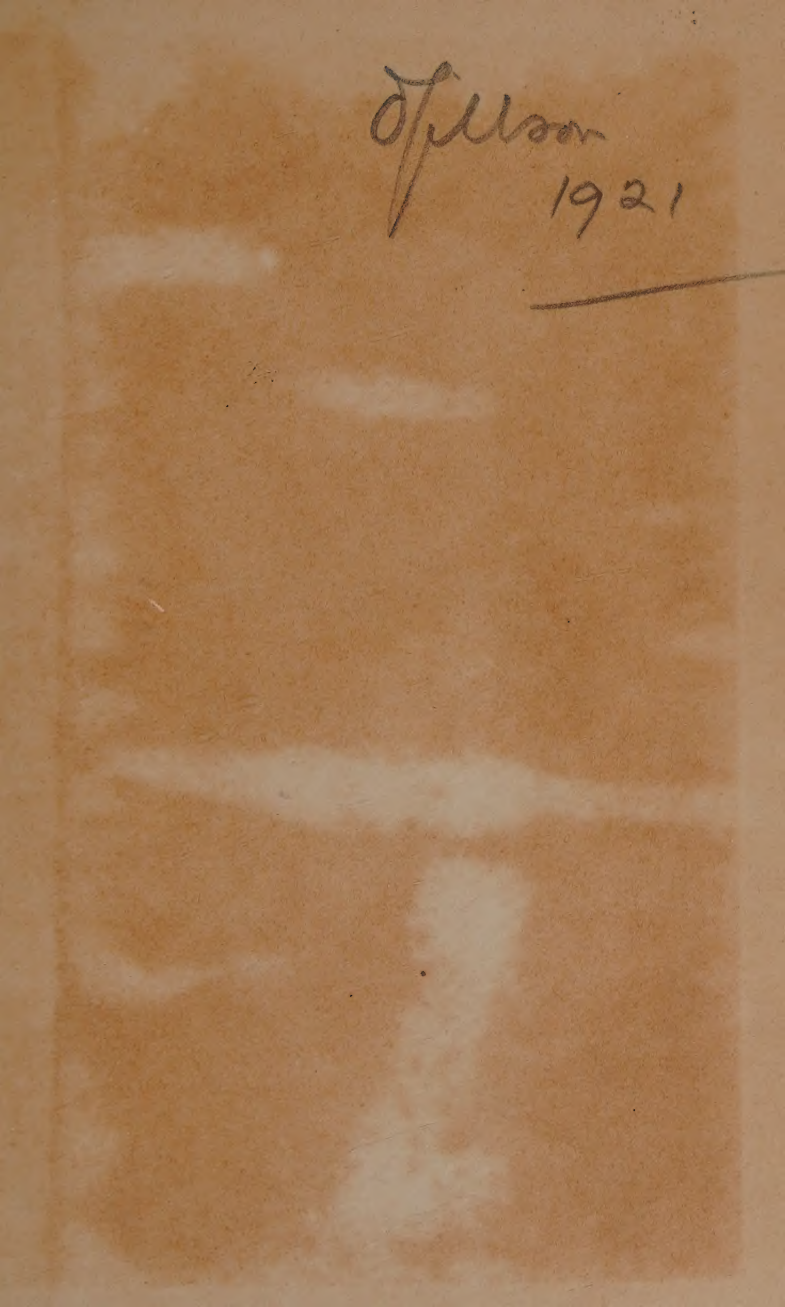
LONDON SCENES

W. R. TITTERTON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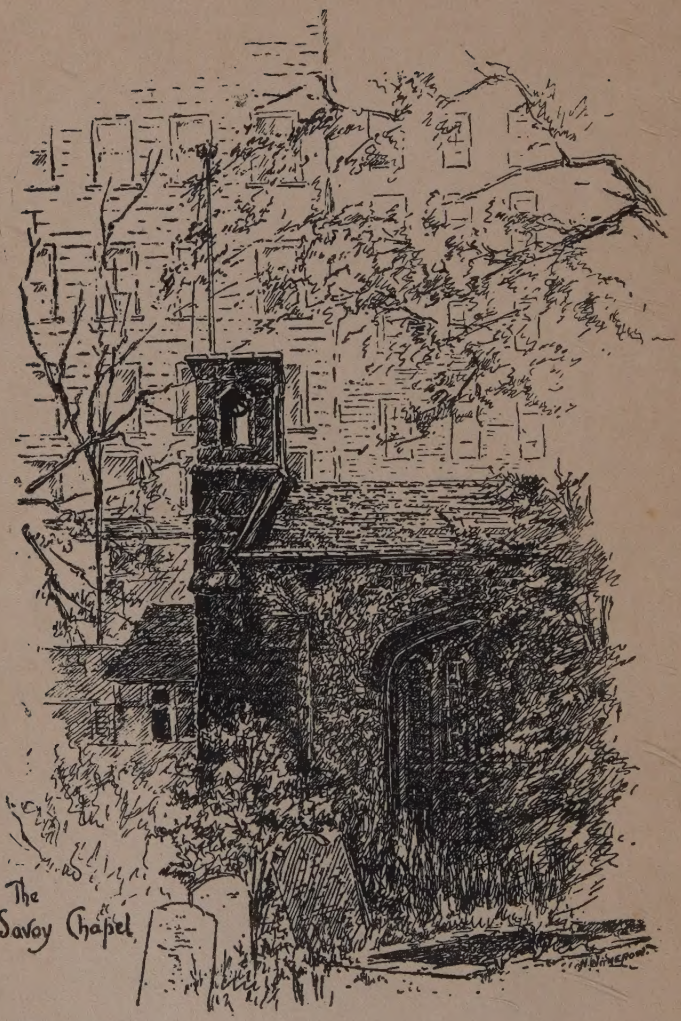

Frontispiece]

LONDON SCENES

BY

W. R. TITTERTON

AUTHOR OF
"AN AFTERNOON TEA PHILOSOPHY" "LOVE POEMS" "GUNS AND GUITARS"
"ME AS A MODEL" "THE DRIFTERS" "FROM THEATRE TO MUSIC-HALL"
ETC. ETC.

In London's fair city,
Where the girls are so pretty,
'Twas there that I first met my Molly.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY L. WITHEROW

LONDON: ANDREW MELROSE LTD.
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1920

PROLOGUE

LONDON BRAVERY

LONDON does not stand the summer well, when she has a summer. There is dust in the air, the shop fronts glare at you, and the pavements radiate heat. The rush of the carriage-way and the jostle of foot-passengers are unnerving; you are too uncomfortable to know that you are hot, too unrestful to realise you are oppressed. Only in the evening, when the lamps shine on the dust and turn it golden, so that it rests above the press of traffic like the rumour of a conflagration, and the side streets and squares are cool, echoing solitudes through which an infrequent motor-car rockets, and the town walks abroad in its main ways *en déshabille* flaunting its lassitude, only then is the London summer to be borne. And the

London summer evening is not always cool, for heat lingers long in her paven, glass-hedged streets.

But with the coming of autumn and the falling of drizzle, she raises her head and looks brisk again, and when the fogs have settled upon her and the air is shrewd, then, indeed, she is the metropolis of the world—the great grey mistress of our island plains.

There are no streets like her streets then—misty, mysterious, endless; no houses like her grey houses throned upon cloud. She has a dreariness that is poignant and masterful, a shabbiness that is grandiose. The tawdriness of her summer mood has vanished; she wears her grey rags as a queen her robes, like a Cinderella who scorns all satins and crystal slippers—though the crystal slippers are not wanting when the rain splashes up from the transparent ways.

Never was magnificence such as shows in this contempt for gaudy splendours, never were such monuments of pride as these piles

of casual grey brick, framed in a slate-grey sky. Yet after all it is not magnificence, it is not pride, it is bravery. The word that springs to the lips is—Undaunted!

Colour, of course, there is plenty, even forgetting the apologetic trees and the upstart red brick—flats mostly—incongruously gay; and a painter will discover you all the tones and semi-tones of the rainbow. Yet just as to the reasonable man white is white and nothing but white, so this picture of London, dripping and triumphant, is grey.

Many a time I have dived into that greyness. I have found it in suburban streets, that else were silly braggarts with their pocket gardens and their stunted, job-lot ornaments. I have found it in blind alleys and stale mews, I have found it in insolent white Mayfair, in plate-glass Oxford Street frothing with women bargainers, in Fleet Street and its crannies. I have found it in the leisured, hidden squares of the City, where those fine fearless churches rise unfalteringly—though the meaningless babble of commerce echoes to their very doors.

Everywhere greyness triumphs, and a sombre, reticent majesty.

But nowhere is the greyness so triumphant, nor the majesty so regal, as in the London docks, that are now too large for their shipping. Here are vast, naked quays and empty storehouses; here a solitary steamer labours at the crane. The long, low line of storehouse roof sweeps round the tenantless basins; here and there rise heaps of rubbish, now and then a tug hoots and comes bustling —dragging Leviathan. And the water is grey and glassy—with now and then a prismatic streak on it—and the sky is a heavy grey. A desolate scene, and a fine one! If you doubt the majesty of it, you do not know how majestic can look a queen who is dethroned.

The sentiment I have for the docks is much like that I have for the river. The river, too, must be seen only when it is dressed in grey. In the sunlight its waters look oily and repulsive, and the southern bank of raw warehouses scrawled over with advertisements (which is the usual prospect)

looks mean and vicious. Even the view up and down the winding streak, with the nobler cluster of spires and dome piling up above the bridges, wants grey sky and grey water to bring out its quality; even the cheerful, crowded shipping of the Pool looks somewhat squalid in the sun.

Yet let the grey bird open its wings above our river, and she is peerless; let but the thin haze mount, and her distances are magical. The width of water becomes immense, the volume of it huge. The warehouses with their impudent phylacteries are the tents and huts of a besieging army, wherever smoke hangs heavy, or twists in slow, wandering spirals through the haze. Then the north bank masses sternly upstream and down behind its leaping bridges, and Waterloo Bridge is an exultant heap of stern grey stone from ricochet to ricochet. Spires in a mist, the far, grey distance, the long, low line of grey!

See where barges pass—a line of them—dull masses in the water, a brave little tug pulling them with a resolute snort, the water

circling away heavily. See here a solitary barge drifting down with the big tide, or borne up on it, a grey bargee walking against his oar with long, slow strides! And over the bridges is an endless thick rush of traffic, the tramp of feet unheard, the rattle and roar almost imperceptible in the tremendous silence.

And the streets where the people dwell, are they ever aught but dirty and distressful? Yes, even here, in grey weather, is a sombre strength, though dry-eyed and desperate. Here, as elsewhere, the spectator is awed by the vast, implacable traffic fighting itself to the death in the sunless air. The men and women of the streets are shabby and something more; the slate-coloured streets and houses are shabby and something more. It is the apotheosis of shabbiness. It is shabby—but it is brave.

The soldiers of London are like their city. In their peace-time scarlet coats they were clockwork figures; and they were infrequent as scarlet days in a London June. But now, look at them now! See how the shabby

men of these shabby streets have risen to arms! See how those gaudy clockwork figures have come to life, and learnt the gestures of heroes! Through those mud-clogged trenches, those shell-swept plains trudge blithely my Cockney warriors in their torn and draggled khaki—shabby as the devil, and magnificent as kings. There is laughter on their lips, but in their eyes is the steady grey—steel-grey of a London winter. Stern and grey are their faces in the cold light of the morning, as they stand to their rifles; grey and exultant are their faces as they go over the top.

Children of the old grey mother that masked too long her strength and her courage; children of grey, shabby streets; of grey, shabby squares; of grey, shabby suburbs; over the top their calm grey faces show behind a fighting edge of steel.

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LONDON SCENES

I.—VICTORIA STATION

THE night is cold. There is a bitter wind. Last night's snow lies white in odd corners of the station yard. Elsewhere the traffic of wheel and foot has blackened it. The lamps are war-time lights —glow-worm lights blackening the darkness. The herd of motor-buses in the yard are monstrous shapes without colour. There are hurrying crowds around you. You hear and feel them plainly; dimly you see.

In one half of the station, the larger half, there are infrequent trains, little business. A few soldiers strolling, fewer civilians. Some ancient porters, grouped round an empty trolley, chatting with low voice. Is Victoria also among the provinces?

But the other half of the station—the

"South-Eastern" half—is wide awake, and all abustle. Gloomy, though, with dull lights and thick shadows and men blotted out suddenly at an exit. Only a blaze of light from the free buffet and gay flags over it. The crowd is khaki, with faint touches of navy blue—not hurried, but trudging to and fro persistently. The sailors move the faster. Some of them wear long black mackintoshes which make their "bell-mouths" look like harem trousers. Almost all of them carry a bundle. What the soldier has he bears on his back. Here and there, like rocks in the slow-moving criss-cross traffic, stand soldiers in twos and threes conversing. Rocks, indeed! Out at the front they have learnt composure, they have learnt to be part of the landscape —which an Englishman rarely, a Londoner never, is. They have the manner of old campaigners, free companions; they with the slouch hats look the more nonchalant and aplomb.

Hurrying through the press, carrying lit lanterns, come railway girls in dirty blue

overalls and blue tam-o'-shanters—or one with a laden trolley, steering it with a warning cry, but sublime recklessness. The groups shift and the currents turn imperturbably. But here comes a trolley packed with coffee-urns and pushed by three girls in spotless blue overalls, the head draped in a nurse's mantilla.

Khaki takes no notice, takes notice of nothing, it is just *there*. At the doorway of the free buffet stands a military policeman—a red band round the cap, a white favour round the arm—scrutinising passes before yielding a way. Inside there is a peaceful riot of cups, slices, buns, sandwiches, and lifted arms. The women behind the counter cluck and run distractedly with a tired smile from customer to customer.

At one side of the station a row of women lean over a barrier. On the wall facing them is a blackboard indicator showing that a train from —— will arrive in a few minutes, and another fifteen minutes after that. Two hundred men will come by the first train, six hundred by the second. Through a door-

way in the wall a military policeman comes, looks round briskly at nothing, and disappears again. Between the wall and the barrier a few constables stamp their feet to slow time, and chat over the shoulder. It is bitterly cold. Up a dim incline into the station and past the backs of the waiting women rumbles a W.D. motor, the driver up to the eyes in overcoat. Another coffee-laden trolley passes — blue overalls, curls, laughing eyes, and white mantillas attendant. The train is late.

An Australian stops beside you to watch the gathering crowd of women at the barrier.

"What's the push, over there?" he asks.

I tell him. "Oh! that! Well, they'll be out of it for a day or two."

He grins, and turns away.

There is a buffalo-roar and the churning sound of an advancing train; followed by a general rush of unattached elements for the barrier stretching away along the arrival platform.

Muffled-up khaki begins to dribble out—mostly officers, with porter (male or female) and trolley behind. The officers are casual and unembarrassed, and quite clean—which is disappointing. But one of them carries an arm in a sling. One man, otherwise in ordinary get-up, froths round the neck with sheepskin. Most of them are bronzed, one or two of them are deadly pale.

Then the rank and file begin to pass, with the heavy trudge which drags the foot from the invisible clay. The slung rifle wags above the humped pack like a long neck. They look less like soldiers than like tired workmen with their bags of tools; or just such a carriage and gait we have seen in labourers homing from the fields.

Many of them cluster round a stall on the platform where our coffee-urns, bright blue overalls, curls, laughing eyes, and mantillas have come to rest. Some besiege a pigeon-hole of money-changing surmounted by an exhortation to soldiers not to be cheated—

elsewhere. Some saunter past the waiting women; yet no voice cries hail. No woman's voice, that is; but badged civilian men of all sorts and sizes invite soldiers to hostels, while a military policeman at the barrier shouts the time and starting-place of trains.

Another bellow and rush, and the second train is in. The stream thickens, the coffee-stalls are doing great business; there is a long queue before the money-changer's box. On the carriage-way between the two platforms squads and companies of "homeless" soldiers form up waiting for an escort. The Scotsmen move to their station with that easy dancing step of theirs not all the mud of the trenches can destroy. The Dominion men slouch to the halt, and group magnificently, leaning on their rifles, lazily defiant, a very monument of battle. Almost you think to see above them banners blown fiercely in the wind. Squad after squad marches off behind a proud civilian shepherd, coffee-stall customers munching slices have plodded out, the money-changer's queue has

diminished, is gone, the W.D. motor-waggon has rumbled out again—the driver wrapped up to the eyes. But the women wait on. It is just as if none of them has found her mate.

II.—TEA-TIME

A SHORTAGE in tea? Absurd! Who is it starts these rumours? . . .

Outside London it is a white evening, but here in the dark streets the snow is wet upon the cheek and slush upon the pavement. Ferocious motor-buses appear out of nothing, heave up, and swing round at the hazardous Piccadilly crossing. Stray passengers—whiffs of black shadow—fly in a flurry from pavement to pavement past imperturbable policemen. On the pavement a sombre crowd rushes *en masse*. The snow—or rain, is it?—eddies and beats.

Brought up by good fortune against a dimly radiant doorway, you detach yourself from the current and push at the door. It revolves, and, like a conjuring trick, the world is changed. For the moment you see nothing

but a dazzle of light, feel nothing but a hush of calm.

Then you notice around you casual groups of men and women, some wrapped up for the weather, most of them peeled and polished. Quickly—almost with a blush—you remove your overcoat.

Threading your way cautiously through the oblivious crowd, another and vaster hall opens before you, a hall whose distances are misty with subdued light, a hall that sparkles brightly with silver ware and gay faces, and ripples with chatter and light laughter and the clink of china. Searching for a haven, you seem to pass over a sea of faces.

Everybody is at his ease, lounging, *chez lui*. You feel that you are an intruder. Your mood is that of the weather — not of this Dresden-China-tea-time. One of those benevolent persons who preserves the frock-coat from extinction sees you bewildered, and drops you in a nook.

Instantly you are part of it; the cosy chatter surrounds you, soothes you. The lazy tobacco smoke conquers your mood. At

last you are able to see round you distinctly. Women and khaki, women and khaki—here and there a black note with a bored face at the top of it. White-aproned waitresses pass continually with laden metal tray held high. The gentleman in the frock-coat jumps and hovers, rubbing his hands.

"You may have all my sugar," says an officer at the next table. A woman's voice thanks him ironically—"As if I did not know you had sweets in your pocket!"

The officer has a shade over an eye, but his tunic would have betrayed him. It is well fitting, but he wears it like a soldier—not like a fop. Over there is a bevy of fops—groomed to the finger-tips. You murmur an imprecation; and then notice that one of them has a crutch.

A waitress, quietly come to rest before you, recalls you to affairs. Tea? Yes! And what with it? You venture upon toast. That seems patriotic. Besides, everybody is eating toast. The tea and the toast float in instanter.

Busy with the second cup you become

critical. Whence came all this tea? Did anybody have to stand in a queue for it? Do any of these women, so calm and well ordered and lazy, have to stand in queues?

It is a short walk across slush and traffic to the Flappers' Palace. There is a crush at the doors—flappers, soldiers, and civilians. The girls at the sweetstuff counters in the foyer are hard at it. The ground-floor hall is packed with people, though the faint sound of music welcomes you in.

Downstairs there is more room, if not much more. Striving not to trip to the measure of the waltz tune played by the band, you find an empty table. You look at the band, and turn away. You look at the walls, and turn back to the band. The musicians have, most of them, small pointed features, a square block of a forehead, and insurgent hair. One of them is masked by Clarkson in a marvellous beard. The walls are chunks of pale brawn—or is it marble?

You did not know there were so many flappers in the world — and so many Australians. There is a merry chatter and

stir, the band rollicks, a constant stream of newcomers fills the aisle. Coy maidens in couples pass civilians with hauteur, and seat themselves beside soldiers — and there a solitary young officer is enfiladed.

You had meant to watch the courtships, but your eyes are fascinated by a loathsome spectacle just before them. Two girls are spreading honey on toasted scones, while truncated cones of jelly and red and white blancmange stand beside them. When the scones are finished they spread the honey on cake! When you look again at the officer he is flirting for dear life with the waitress. But the soldiers—Dominion soldiers they are —have succumbed, and with mocking glance and slow-moving lips they answer the vivacious banter of the girls.

Just down the street is a tea-shop. It looks very gloomy after these haunts of pleasure; and it is half empty. One o'clock is the busy hour, and now most of the customers are on their way home. But down in the smoking-room there is a detached clatter of dominoes, and round the tables the waitresses linger

and chat. At the end of the room great urns steam upon the counter. Behind the counter a hidden presence cries, "Tea for two," "Tea for one," "Tea for three."

Out in the street again, a snatch of talk comes to you: "And would you believe it, my grocer has promised to let me have a quarter of a pound on Monday. But you never know. It don't seem hardly likely, do it?"

III.—GOING HOME

THE City's evening streets are thinly peopled. In the lesser ways the half-light gives a feeling almost of solitude. But in the main thoroughfares there is traffic enough, only it is awheel, and the motor-buses are half empty. A pair of cart horses, splashing up sunset fire from the wet carriage-ways, are the drowsy lords of Lombard Street—Lombard Street, where the trade signs are molten gold. In the dull thunder of London, which you do not hear, the office fronts rise up as silent as the walls of a citadel.

A clock strikes the hour—another—another. A stray figure or two darts from this doorway and that. The next moment there is a huge buzz and clatter, and many clashing cries; the streets are filled with people. From every door in every mon-

strous block of offices a stream pours forth. It is an exodus, an evacuation. It is as though suddenly the City had been stricken with the plague, and the people were flying for their lives. The crowd is hurried, resolute, each atom of it intent on its business, sure of its destination. The streams meet, mingle, and part almost without a jostle.

The motor-buses are filled in a breath—the gangways packed with strap-hangers. Strident conductresses brush continually a swarm of interlopers from the footboards.

Packed are the Tube stairways, packed are the booking-halls—to the walls, to the ticket pigeon-holes, to the lifts.

Borne down the stairway inch by inch, you look into the hall at a floor of heads, moving like the grains of sand in an hour-glass. Can such a frantic medley ever resolve itself?

Down in the booking-hall the jostle begins. There is a constant coercive push away from the line towards the pigeon-holes. The rest is a hurricane with the vision of a snappish

booking-clerk, framed in light, in the middle of it.

More hurricane, then the lift. An autocratic maiden orders you to move farther up there, though, save over bodies of the slain, 'twere impossible. Nevertheless, meekly you do your endeavours.

"Next lift, please!"

The gate clangs to; with a sick heave the lift descends.

Down below, the staircase to the platform is choked. From the platform a porter grins at you imperiously through a grating. The platform is packed, too, and a train is in; the inchoate queues clambering and pushing at its entrances.

The train starts, the grating is pushed back, rattling; you silt on to the platform. Another train shoots in.

Mad porters with an insolent bark order you alternately to hurry up and to wait. There is a blind, breathless fight, tooth and claw.

Now you are on the train, and harsh voices, borne upon the storm, harry you, hoot you, bully you into the carriage, where you stand

gazing at close quarters into a lady's eyes, while an unknown presence prods you in the back, and jibes your heels.

Still the crowd elbows and pushes its way on to the train, until human flesh can bear no more compression, and the gates are

One of the Shanties.

squeezed to. Bells and a whistle! You shoot into a tunnel.

A nightmare journey! Roaring tunnels, and the dazzle of stations where voices bark and shoulders push and jostle around you once more.

. . . . . .

Down on the Embankment trams wait in herds. Crowds, gathering from all quarters, dance and dart through the hazardous cross traffic to a series of shanties with labelled gangways in them. You know your gangway—in the second shanty down the Embankment—and you sprint to join the queue.

It is getting darker now, and figures jump at you suddenly as they mass round. Functionaries with stable-lanterns shepherd the herd of trams. Hoarse orders *da capo*, but here of clear command to tram-drivers. *Your* ways are disciplined by the wooden barriers. In the dull light of the shanty it is even possible to read the latest news.

Trams pack, and move off stately; queues vanish, and re-form. Dark figures in swarms rush past continually.

And just over there — under your feet almost—is the calm river. The faint shifting shimmer of the night-sky in it curdles to blackness. Here and there is a stray light, here and there is a trail of barges, purple-black on the dull radiance, moving mysteriously. On the farther bank a jagged

Evening.

silhouette of strong, coarse shapes. One tall chimney points like a finger at the sky.

Across the river, ending it, making a lake of it, the bridge swells calmly and sombrely on its leaping buttresses. The laden trams circle away from us, touch the foot of the bridge, mount with it : their little bright eyes shining in their high, dark masses ; and so pass serenely from our tumult to another world. Only the sceptic will try to remember that on the farther bank comes another struggle, fiercer than ours.

The streets are black now, are a visible darkness. Progress along the pavement is a scurry and bump. Motor-buses materialise without warning. Yet at every stopping-point black figures fight for entry. Here, too, wounded soldiers on crutches make the attempt, and turn back with a laugh. London going home has no thought for anything but dispatch.

And now, in near or distant suburbs or slums, the Tubes and trains are disgorging. For these and these and these the nightmare is over, the insane hurry has gone.

Truly, they do not loiter, but they begin to look about and to notice things; they march as though what their feet took hold of belonged to them. One or another, bravely optimistic, stops to do some shopping.

Should you walk in the City now you would find the streets deserted. Empty pavements, silent eyeless houses—up above which you look now for the first time at the narrow distant ribbon of the sky. From time to time through the main ways a motor passes with a huge, separate rattle, leaving but a deeper silence behind it. In the side streets your footsteps echo from pavement to housefront and back again. You are alone in a dead city. From far off a train hoots forlornly. London has gone home.

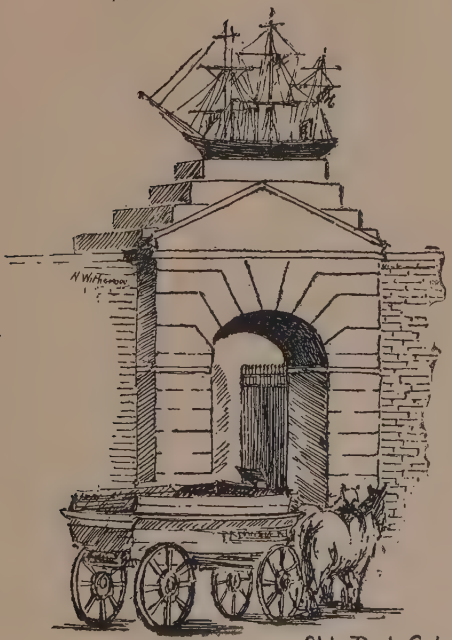
IV.—THE DOCKS

THE ways to the docks are dirty and drab. Grimy warehouses frown at desolate streets filled with shabby people slithering swiftly through the mud. Drays and waggons rattle empty to the docks, or rumble away from them laden. The long stretch of blank dock-wall is ugly and inhuman, yet it has a certain grandeur. All traffic makes for the gates. Behind those walls is the heart and the meaning of this business.

At the gate there is challenge and countersign, and the production of passes. Within is a stretch of mud—and more warehouses, stuck here and there oddly. Above one long, low roof shoots a tangle of masts and spars.

Little by little, as you advance, the vista opens. It is a vista of cranes, and

masts, and funnels, of slate-painted ship-sides, of long warehouses, of busy quays, and, at last, of barges jumbled higgledy-



Old Dock Gate.

piggledy on the greasy water of the basin.

Cranes that are miniature Eiffel Towers straddle the way by the quay-side. Cranes

shoot out from high up on the walls of warehouses—as they do from under the roofs of some old houses abroad. There are cranes on shipboard, there are cranes everywhere; and everywhere they are rattling abruptly, and turning with a slow sweep.

Huge bales and boxes dangle from them—appear from nowhere, hover feather-lightly in the air, swing round, and descend on to the barges. Instantly a swarm of men are at them, pushing and clawing. Just out of range a tally-clerk stands, calmly recording each fresh miracle. Stevedores, between whiles, stand lazily in plaster groups, steel claw at the thigh, watching without interest the manœuvres of the crane. On the high-up deck of a liner a stray deck-officer, bored to blasphemy, spits contemptuously into the water.

Here and there, but not often, the bales and boxes rise from barge to ship. Here and there a barge, stuffed and tarpaulined, or stark empty, breaks from the ruck and turns its nose to the exit—a darkly silhouetted lighterman walking heavily against

Limehouse Basin.

his long oar. Through the exit, under and over the flying bridge, is another dim vista of water, warehouse, and quay. Across the vista flits a tug. A long way off, from the river belike, a liner calls.

In the dim-lit quay-warehouses bales and boxes are piled high on either hand. The piles stretch along and along in lessening perspective, with labourers, slowly trundling bales, between them. There is a vague nameless scent, a mixture of many scents, with jute for the basis. You move past a square-cut opening in the quay-ward wall, which frames a picture of ship, cranes, and working stevedores; and the perfume grows more pungent. Here are barrels, some with the bungs out. Here are crates of onions—one or two broken open, and the onions spilled. And here is that unmistakable heavy scent of foot sugar—to my mind one of the finest perfumes in the world; but a remembrance of the fruits of youthful filibustering may account for that.

And now you are out on the quay of another basin, where is more loading and

unloading, rattle of chains, cries, and the mysterious swing through air of huge merchandise.

Still farther on you see the halves of a bridge circle apart to let in a battered tramp limping behind a consequential tug. There is a cluster of men on the tramp's deck—black, yellow, and white. The captain on the bridge, in a gaudy uniform, seems the only indisputable Englishman on board.

And now a clean saltish breeze salutes you. You are at the end of the last basin, and a Custom House officer, popping out from his rabbit-hutch, seems inclined to bar your passage, but subsides with a doubtful glance. You turn a corner, and there is the open river before you. Very vast it looks after the narrow limits of the docks, very vast, and very empty. One dwarfed liner amidstream puffing spasmodically, a few tugs wagging clumsy tails of barges, a river police launch rocketing along through greasy waves of its own making—nothing else between you and the mud flats on the farther bank.

The Isle of Dogs

But if you should be so lucky as to get a skiff down to the Pool, there you would find the river busy enough: a very fleet of barges, lighters, and all the small fry of shipping rubbing shoulders in grimy and picturesque confusion.

By devious ways you come to other docks, more grimy, and quite desolate. Here are long lengths of quay, without a keel to them Here the water seems stagnant, and shimmers unnaturally with prismatic colours. In the corners flotsam and jetsam of timber, broken barrels, and filth. The warehouses are hollow and echoing. Why has this dock-basin been so utterly forgotten?

With a slight shiver you hurry back to busier basins, where now the cranes have a merry note, and life is adventure. But hardly are you there when a bell clangs, and the business slackens. Bales on the way continue their descent, but no fresh ones appear. Gradually the stevedores jump on shore, gather inside the warehouses for a moment's chat, and then make for the exit.

You go with them. The press thickens as you go.

It is another exit you have found, and outside you are in true sailortown. Buck niggers, indescribably ragged, or in gorgeous raiment; Lascars, in whitish turbans and nondescript slops; impassive, slit-eyed Chinamen; high-cheekboned Norwegians—some with a touch of the Mongol—saunter along the muddy pavement, or cluster at the street-corners. Unfamiliar inscriptions are over some of the shops, where oilskins, high boots, ships' biscuits, kit bags, and binoculars make a brave show. Clouds of steam come from the cook-shops. There is a crowd before every pub. From the end of the street sounds the short sharp warning of an electric tram.

V.—AN EAST END MUSIC-HALL

THE gallery queue — splashed with khaki — is stretching already beyond Madame Levinstein's Paris fashions, and threatens to barricade Jones's celebrated Fried Fish Shop. But the hour is late when you join on, and hardly have you taken your stand firmly between a late customer of Jones's, still busy with his potatoes, and a young lady in a long plush coat reading a novelette and simulating a gumboil with toffee, when there is a shuffle of feet, and the column moves slowly, spasmodically forward.

You pass from the street to a stairway climbing a topless tower. It would be nightmarish, this slow, endless ascent, only your neighbours are merry, and "chaff" each other familiarly. At the back of your mind you seem to remember that even West End

Londoners were once as merry as this when waiting for the play.

All things have an end save friendship, and so the pay-box is reached, and you are staggering into a blaze of light before the "chaffing" is over.

You are shortly pushed and squeezed into a bench without a back in the last row but one. That row fills in a breath, and you have a back to your seat—a pair of khaki legs whose owner invites you to "lean back, and make yourself at home, daddy!"

There is a huge buzz, chatter, and stir all over the house. You are surprised to find that these people have really come to enjoy themselves. The lady in the plush coat, who has somehow got into the row before you, spots a friend in front; and they rise and bandy badinage in a harsh falsetto. Already a cloud of tobacco smoke floats over the stalls.

Then a flaming transparency on either side of the curtain announces "1," the band starts, and the house is silent, for this is already part of the show. Only, when a familiar tune leaps from the score, the gallery helps it out

with the words. The best help seems to come from the soldiers.

The curtain, you notice now for the first time, is a patchwork of advertisement—most of it sadly out of date. A pastrycook vaunts his cakes, a butcher implores you to try his famous mutton. Even the offer to supply you with a complete set of teeth for twenty odd shillings seems somewhat ironical.

No. 2 on the transparencies. The conductor taps with his baton, the band breaks into a fresh rollick, and the advertisements disappear.

On to a sylvan glade (backcloth) a little maiden, disguised as a Cherookee Indian, and mounted upon a bicycle, dashes with a wild whoop. Others follow her, and presently the stage is filled with whirling figures, apparently freed from the law of gravity, and hovering in all strange postures over and round about their handle-bars. But the house has had its fill of trick cyclists, and mere cleverness only bores. There are whistles, claps, and roaring, until the poor Cherookee maidens wheel to the footlights in line, dis-

mount, bow with a painful, nervous smile, and the curtain sweeps down on them.

Turn succeeds turn with varying fortune. A middle-aged girl, with thickly powdered face, abbreviated skirts, and centipedal energy, is desired to "go home and look after the kids!" A solemn lady of generous proportions, who wails sorrowfully, is greeted with dog-yelps and the invitation not to "tell us, missus, if it hurts yer!" But a pair of young athletes, disguised in lounge suits, who dance as if moved by one string, and endure the heartaches of a thousand double-shuffles, bring down the house. The longer they last the louder the applause, and you can visualise the manager regretting over a large cigar that they cannot be trained to last the evening through.

And now the house breaks into tumult. Whistles, roars, sharp cries, the thunder of hands and feet. The band plays a tune you seem to have heard a hundred times—but where? A shortish man in a wrong hat and shabby clothes, and with a great good-humoured smile on his broad face, bursts,

bounds upon the stage. The words he sings are negligible, the tune is commonplace. And yet they hold you. Far away down there as he is, the man bulks so large, his gestures are so strong, his personality is so compelling and so jolly. You are too happy to grope after the formula, but you know that this careless riot is finer than art. Divorcing yourself from the mood of the place, you look round at your neighbours, and there you see what you felt—happiness.

Then, as if by clockwork, every mouth is agape, and everybody in the theatre is singing. And the singing of that chorus is your greatest surprise. You expected something jolly—a blissful echo of the song. Not a bit of it! It starts softly, it swells and spreads, but it stays a huge mysterious whisper, solemn—almost sad. The band stops, and in the silence, as it were, you hear that great mysterious whisper treading softly on.

The programme subsides through a dullish sketch to "the pictures," very brief, during the exhibition of which the house buttons up its overcoats to make ready for the rush. A

final obbligato from the band, and then strident voices shouting, "This way out!" "Hurry up, there!"

Outside in the street the queues are already formed up for the second house

VI.—THE EMPORIUM

A GIGANTIC commissionaire, or a soldierly-looking lady adapted from revue, guards the portals. Women buzz and settle along the window-fronts like swarms of summer flies; but the pressure of the main swarm takes you through the door. Instantly your glasses fog over.

Outside it was cold, windy, desolate. Here it is warm and cheerful. Here are gay colours (dimly scanned through the blur of your spectacles), and the careless opulence of display. Here is a lively stir of folk, a lively hum and chatter. It is a huge fair, a Bank Holiday of barter.

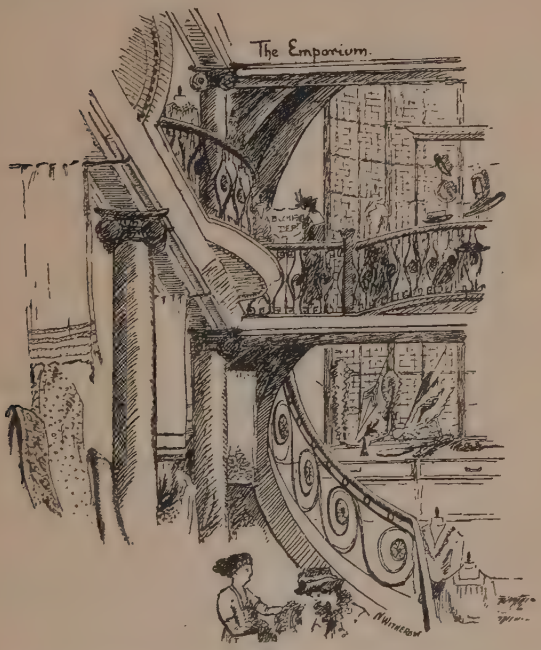
Even when you have wiped your spectacles you do not see clearly the details of things. Things are so many and various that they swirl round you madly. You are aware of a boiling surf of customers, out of which, now

and then, an arm rises with a flourish; you are aware of glass counters, of colour and shine, of a million articles and stuffs of all shapes, sizes, and purposes—but all blurred and blended — only here and there, by a caprice of the vision, one stray object outlined with startling definiteness. All else shifts and changes. But in the centre of things you see the faces of shop-girls, calm, indifferent, slightly disdainful.

When you get more used to your surroundings, and have persuaded your eyes to linger over this and that, you are astonished to note how the women customers trifle with the goods of the shopkeeper. Every hand is busy, diving, darting. Rich stuffs float like banners, *objets d'art* are handled with the aplomb of a conjurer. Almost, you would say, it was the sack of a city, and the victors paused in the pouching—staggered by the immensity of the spoils.

What wonderful philanthropist is this who has surrendered his wealth to the people? Surrender it is, you think, for to pocket the stuff would be so easy. And then you

remember having heard of police-court cases, of women charged with shop-lifting, of evidence given by detectives employed by



the philanthropist. You shiver slightly, give a sharp eye to your neighbours, and step away from them. The whole generous carelessness is a trap. Eyes are everywhere, no doubt, on the watch, on the pounce.

The philanthropist does not wish, of course, to have women arrested for shop-lifting, but, where pretty-pretties are concerned, every woman is at heart a kleptomaniac, and, when pretty-pretties are thrown so recklessly at her, she must either buy or burn.

With a noiseless, smooth wrench a lift takes you to another floor. Here you are among tapestries, carpets, antique furniture fresh from the factory; fewer customers, a sense of space and repose. And here is statuary in marble, plaster, and bronze, work of the goldsmith and silversmith, all manner of costly knick-knacks, tasteful and otherwise, oil paintings by masters and apprentices, evidence of vast, crude wealth, parvenu and oppressive.

Another flick upwards and you are in a Madame Tussaud's of headless waxworks draped in gorgeous gowns. It is, after all, very like a fashionable reception, where the faces are so much less important than the clothes.

But tall and "exquisitely groomed" hostesses with pretty, vacant faces lurk in

recesses and swim out at the customer who pauses before a creation. The sequel you see farther on, where a young lady with a merry, piquant face, trips out of an inner chamber in gay feathers—and furs, and stops before a mournful-looking man with sombre, critical eyes.

Against your will your mind busies itself with press paragraphs about standard dresses, and the shortage in staple materials. Against your will you have a vision of shabbily dressed women standing in margarine queues. Against your will one sentence keeps recurring in your brain: "The extravagance of some munition-girls is appalling."

Much the same reflections come to you when you pass through the boot department and see pretty ladies trying on the most fantastic of foot-wear. Yet a certain masculine weakness compels the reservation that such charming feet deserve to be daintily shod.

But everywhere the flutter of frou-frou, the rustle of silk, the soft glow of fur, everywhere the signs of wealth, leisure, and security.

Books—a very library, stationery of the finest sort, a reading-room, with cosy arm-chairs, writing-desks, the latest magazines and newspapers, and a blazing fire. Groups of women here and there, some with parcels, talk in low tone. In an arm-chair by the fire a large expensive dowager sleeps.

The sounds of music draw you through a winter garden of trees into a vast hall shining with white napery and glittering with polished metal. Every seat at every little table is filled, and every sitter is lunching. Or rather, half the world is waiting for the meal that never comes, for waitresses are few. Where do all these women come from? How is it that they are so free of their time? No matter! The meal is excellent, when it comes; and the music drowses you to a feeling of delicious contentment.

When you emerge from your languor an association of ideas leads you towards the provision department. On your way you pass through rooms, shops, filled with crocks, with pots and pans, with wringers, tubs, baths, magical contrivances for carving

designs in potatoes, patent knife-cleaners—all the artifice and finesse of scientific housekeeping. Here and there a demonstrator, intoning ritual, shows how the thing is done to a congregation of women.

The provision store is packed. The crowd heaves and pushes. There is a medley of shouts and cries. On long white slabs are high piles of fishes. You see them at odd moments only, when there is a break in the crowd. You know the margarine counter by its label, for there the crowd is dense. The tempting rows of poultry and game are neglected. In the corners of one room are battlements of tinned meat. High up behind the meat counters hang whole carcases. Yet here there is no crowd, and the white overalled attendants gossip idly. For a legend announces, "No meat on sale to-day." You wonder why.

On your way out you pass through the sweet store. There is a strong smell of chocolate. The counters are laden with all manner of delicacies, and the trade is brisk. He were a madman who, in such a surround-

ing, should maintain that there is a shortage in sugar.

Too proud to ask your way, somehow or other you wander into a bank—a bank in a tradesman's shop! You have no doubt that, on inquiry, a polite official would direct you to the religious department, where a special staff of curates conduct services from nine till six.

You drift into the street dazed, overwhelmed with the immensity of things.

VII.—VISITING DAY

THERE is a Sundayish air in the streets. The pavements look cleaner, foot-passengers move at a slower pace; there is less wheeled traffic on the carriage-ways, and before the gates of the hospital are women, in plush mantles and straw hats, selling flowers. They are perpetually busy with the making of fresh posies; but the ritual cry, "Nice daffydills, lydy; market bunch, sir?" rises unceasingly. Now and again the song descended to argument: "Couldn't do it for less, dearie; they cost me ninepence in the market s'mornin'."

Their customers gather slowly. They are mostly women, and nearly all of them are shabbily dressed. Some of them are in mourning, and have the pitiful *blasé* look of burnt-out sorrow. Everybody carries a parcel. Chatter grows with the growing

crowd, till the flower-women must cry their loudest to advertise their wares.

On the first-floor balcony men in blue hospital uniform lounge in pillowed ease, or lean over the railing with a cigarette. One or another catches sight of a friend in the crowd, and gets the latest news, too hot to wait, of Cis or Bertie. One who, you guess, expects no visitor, singles out a pretty girl, dubs her Flossie, and tells her where she may find him.

The clock strikes the hour, an ancient with a gay stripe of colour on his chest appears behind the gates. They open; the crowd presses in. As you mount the steps and pass the portico a subtle scent meets you. If you have never been in a hospital you will hardly notice it, yet you will never forget it. A doctor would tell you it is the scent of iodoform.

Inside the large, cool hall the crowd hesitates, somewhat daunted by the sight of brisk nurses and orderlies in swift passage from corridor to mysterious corridor. Then accustomed visitors take the lead, and the

flock follows. To the officials it must seem like a riot. The place is so quiet and so orderly, and you troop up haphazard with such civilian clamour.

The crowd diminishes. Visitors for

"Kelvin" and "Brewster" stop at the first floor, those for "Lister" and "Armstrong" at the second. Your turn comes. Without preparation you find yourself looking into a long ward, whose floor glistens and winks, whose spotless beds are dressed in line with

impeccable exactness. You see that plainly. Less plainly you see patches of bright blue, and many faces turned your way.

Your heart gives a sudden thump as you walk down the aisle. You peer right and left at the faces, some of them half hidden with criss-cross bandages, but all of them smiling. You walk the length of the ward, and have not yet found your man. Then a voice calls you, and in a moment you are sitting by his side. He looks so different; yet how could you have missed him? He looks pale, curiously refined, very calm. Quickly he makes you forget he is a wounded man, and you are busy with gossip of home. He refuses blankly to talk about the war, says he is "fed up" with the war, the lady visitors are always talking about the war; tell him how the crocuses are coming on, and what about young Johnny? Also, what is there in the parcel?

Presently you have experience of a lady visitor. A splendid vision, she pauses on the farther side of the bed, and assures you that your man is a hero. He fidgets with the

coverlet, and gives you a furtive wink. How is my brave fellow doing to-day? And has he read the book she left him? He's doing very well, thank you, marm, and the book

A flower-girl.

is very pretty. Next moment she is gone, leaving behind her a whiff of delicate perfume and a packet of cigarettes.

"Tasty trifles!" whispers your man with some contempt, as he reads the label on the

packet; "and before the war I never smoked nothing worse than Woodbines."

The best of the news given and taken, you look round curiously at the other patients. Very young most of them seem—mere boys some of them, though one or two are grizzled veterans with the indescribable stiff composure of the old Army. None of them is like the toughened, ruddy warriors you see in railway stations and in the street, trudging home on leave. Not only the mud has gone, but the toughness. Their faces are thin and pale, their skin is transparent; their eyes are quiet, yet show the remembrance of pain. For all that they are wonderfully merry, quite at their ease, quite without self-consciousness. Even that young fellow with his eyes peeping out of a mask of bandage chatters like a schoolboy. Even that pale face prone on the pillow, scarcely able to turn to the visitor, lights up with laughter. Even this boy, hopping down the ward on crutches and his one remaining leg, is triumphantly serene.

Only from behind screens comes a babble of strange talk—gibberish, curses, words of

command, battlecries. Came in last night with the convoy, your man tells you, and had to be taken upstairs for his operation at once. Evidently a bad case, torn in the body somewhere.

Your man tells you something of his mates —No. 4 got his Blighty at Cambrai. No. 7 got "done in" on a night patrol—the only survivor—and crawled in, dragging a smashed leg. No. 8 was blown up by a mine, and lay unconscious for hours till the stretcher-bearers found him. All this is told you as calmly as if it were an everyday affair—as, indeed, it is. But here and now it seems frankly incredible. It cannot be that the men lying so peacefully around you in this peaceful ward with the grey light of London shining through the windows have come straight from that! You have a vision of the other place, a moment's vision of mud and flame . . . and then you are in the quiet, orderly ward again, chatting about your next-door neighbours and the complexity of the meat-card.

A bell rings loudly outside the ward; the

visitors begin to bestir themselves. Conversation breaks out again frantically for a moment or two; then an orderly in felt slippers marches from bed to bed warning visitors that their time is up. There is a huge bustle of leave-taking and the bestowal of parcels. Finally Sister appears at the door, and says magisterially, "Visitors must go now!" The patients, somewhat shocked at the slowness of consequent departure, hustle their friends away.

As you turn to take a last look at the ward you find that already it has begun to live its own life again. A nurse is wheeling a dumb-waiter laden with bottles, dressings, and instruments along the aisle. An orderly and two convalescent patients are distributing plates. Another patient brushes by you with a high piled-up plate of bread and butter. Your man is shouting something across to another bed. You seem already quite forgotten, you feel utterly irrelevant.

VIII.—THE COURTS OF JUSTICE

CONSCIOUS that Justice is an ancient institution, the pleasing façade of the Law Courts, with its absurd pepper-castor turrets, apes the manners of age. Though genuine antiques—inns, squares, and gardens—lurk in the alley-ways, life at its most modern flows past the gateways of the Courts. Plentiful khaki on the pavement, here and there a maiden in martial get-up, here and there a Frenchman with a stern, rhetorical swagger. Motors, bus and cab, in the carriage-way, now and again a big grey car stuffed with khaki. Till, for a ludicrous contrast, come skipping through the traffic, with flying skirts, barristers fresh from a bolted sandwich and a glass of wine. One of them has his serenely curled wig cocked drunkenly over an eye.

You assume an air of business and resolu-

tion, and march past the constable on guard at the gates; past men in the forecourt, with papers in tie-ups under arm, idling in groups, past more constables on duty at the doorway of the great hall—spacious and silvery-lighted.

The hall is not gloomy—more terrible than that, it has an official air, it might be a county hall, where criminals are docketed instead of condemned. The policemen, with their hats off, and gripping sheaves of papers, who hurry across the echoing flags, seem far more awful than a constable with a truncheon.

Here, for some strange reason, the frenzy of the flying barristers has subsided; at least, here are barristers gossiping, the hands shoved indecorously into the trouser-pockets.

All this is seen at a glance, for there must be no hesitation, or one of the many blue-coated sentries will call a halt. You dive through a narrow doorway, and are instantly lost in a labyrinth of stairways. You meet and are passed by other lost souls. Some, carrying black bags, move swiftly as to a

destination, others trudge up and down stairs blindly, out of hope of deliverance.

The Law Courts.
Some of the peppercastors.

You arrive at a landing—and a corridor. Here are benches packed with people, other people stand gossiping quietly in groups;

there are many doors with a constable before each of them, a few figures hurrying the length of the corridor—there is an air of expectation.

Mixing with the crowds, you rub elbows with an excited fellow orating against time to a polite but incredulous barrister. A dapper little man with a sharp eye and the trap of a mouth, acts as interpreter. You find there are many such groups, all the same stimulating mixture of ice and champagne. But most of the people on the benches look before them with dull indifference.

Then of a sudden you find yourself in a press making for an open door.

You get an impression of dustiness and stuffiness; and here is gloom indeed. The clatter of feet sounds noisily, abruptly. The Court seems shocked by your intrusive chatter. With a flutter, and buzz, and the flaunt of papers, the barristers settle themselves in the front stalls, the laity behind them. The jury-box to the left of the Court is empty. So is the judge's seat,

on the dais, behind a desk stacked with papers.

Again you are surprised. There is a bark of command, a quick silence, a rising of the Court to its feet, *en masse*. Shepherded by a rather dingy fellow in a black robe, a merry old gentleman, bonneted in the rudiments of a wig, and draped in a red dressing-gown, ambles from a doorway at the back of the dais, and subsides into his throne. The Court seats itself, and a black-robed, bewigged person, who has appeared from nowhere, and seated himself directly below the bench and facing the stalls, rises and intones some ritual.

A barrister springs eagerly to his feet, and cries, "Me lord . . ." It is difficult to hear what he says. He speaks in an endless, breathless patter. The judge takes up a quill and drowses over his notes. The barrister drowses over his speech, the Court drowses. Occasionally the rusty usher, who has found a place near the empty jury-box, rises and cries, "Silence in Court!" The one item of activity is a man in the pew

behind the barristers, who fidgets and whispers right and left of him, and glances with malevolence at the drowsing orator.

Fearing complete slumber before your day's work is done, you creep secretly out of the Court, seek another, and another, and find everywhere the same dull drone of drowsiness. Here there are two, here three peaceful judges enthroned, with here a smart-looking old fellow in naval uniform; and here a boxful of perplexed jurymen; and here a prosy witness stuttering through statistics. . . .

But at the Old Bailey, you tell yourself, there will be the throb of life, for there life and liberty are in question.

Outside there has been no attempt to mimic antiquity. The building is as baldly ugly as it is new. But here, too, the entrance halls have a business, official air; though here policemen are more frequent, and they have a manner of smug complaisance.

The Court is sitting, and filled. You squeeze into a side bench, conscious for

the moment only of a quiet, earnest voice. Then you see, high up, the delicate, small features of the red-robed judge; lower down, and just before you, the faces of the jurymen in profile; laymen busily writing in the well of the Court, a barrister busily writing at the far end of a bench; at the other end of it the orator, who pauses now with his left arm stretched sideways and the hand pointing.

Your eyes turn to follow the gesture, and there, behind a glass partition, you see a black hat, a black arm and shoulder, a dusky-pale, expressionless face—though you guess that the eyes wander from the barrister to the jury, from the jury to the judge.

You catch sight of the head of a policeman near the prisoner, and of the blue poke-bonnet of a fresh-complexioned wardress behind him. Away in the depths behind the dock, a crowd of witnesses. Far up in the gallery, the public, their eyes wide open, cheek to the rail.

Turning again to the judge, you notice

now beside him a very old man in dark fur-tipped robes, fast asleep.

The room, with its glass dome and cheap-jack furnishing, looks bright, arid, and mean. It might be a museum—or a lecture hall; and, indeed, though the young counsel speaks earnestly, and is somewhat embarrassed in his delivery, he might well be discussing the organisation of the vertebrates, or the theory of currency. The jury is attentive, yet you catch an occasional yawn. The judge is attentive, yet absolutely unperturbed. Only the ghoul eyes of the public and the pale profile of the prisoner remind you that here is one on trial for her life.

The counsel subsides. There is a brief pause. Then you are aware that the judge has started to speak—quietly, deliberately, in a trickle of sound. He weighs his points and his words—not solemnly, but with almost the relish of a connoisseur. You fancy the delicate lips curl with appreciation of their own impartiality. Yet now and again the frail figure leans over towards the jury-box

The Temple Church
& The Master's House.

with a raised finger, and a point is put with implacable, gentle emphasis. From time to time a soft *bon-mot* breaks the current of the argument, and the Court laughs, though not the judge. Already as the laughter dies he is manœuvring his way from point to point, stating the facts and surveying the inferences with meticulous exactness.

The jury has asked leave to withdraw to consider its verdict. The judge has retired; the prisoner has been allowed to disappear into the depths below the dock. The well of the Court is empty. Two or three brisk young plain-clothes men are gossiping about the weather with the policeman at the door. The public is hard at it laying the odds on the verdict.

The privileged visitors round you are mostly women, and they are all for guilty and a heavy sentence—probably Death. They pass lightly from that to discuss other murder trials they have watched. The Sack Murder—but oh! the list is long; and your flesh creeps as you visualise all the mute agonies they have gloated over.

The jury file back, their names are called, the Court refills. A dapper fellow in black Court dress—knee-breeches, tails, spotless ruffles at the neck and wrists—looks into the Court with a question. Three solemn raps sound. The Court rises. The judge re-enters, and carries now round his prim bewigged face and frail red-robed body an air of Doom. Back comes the prisoner, and sits with her hands clutching the rail of the dock.

The gentlemen of the jury have considered their verdict? Yes, my lord. And it is? Without hesitation—and yet what hours pass ere he answers?—the foreman says, "Guilty."

Possibly the prisoner does not understand, for she does not stir. A little dark-haired man rises, and says something in a foreign tongue. Instantly the prisoner becomes voluble, and you are aware for the first time how young she is. The judge silences her with a gesture, and utters a few words of ritual. Then her protests break out again. Again she is silenced. Her counsel ven-

tures a few apologetic remarks. The other counsel, who was so busy writing, looks up, and shows you a plump, comfortable face lit with steady, sombre eyes. He rises and says quietly a few words to the judge. The judge nods, looks calmly before him, and gives the sentence of the Court. Still the tense fingers clench the rail of the dock, still the white profile presses over it. The interpreter rises once more and explains. Then—but who would wish to detail the anguish of the condemned? You see a crumple of black hauled out of sight by wardresses. Then you make your way out of Court with a constable crying in your ear, "Witnesses are to wait."

IX.—THE MARKETS

AT midnight the market, Covent Garden Market, is empty, a serene shuttered solitude counting the quick footfalls of stray passengers. Yet it has an air of expectation ; it seems on guard against the morrow.

In the early morning hours, up all the main ways of the Metropolis laden carts rumble from the country behind tired horses —carts piled mountain-high with crates, boxes, tubs, stacks of vegetables and fruits. A sleepy driver, cap pulled down well over the eyes, sacking or more luxurious horse-cloths pulled up above the waist, drowses at the reins.

In the open space about the market they gather—magically, from all quarters. Soon, in the blinkered low light of the market lamps you see rows of horses drinking from the troughs, or muzzling their way into a

nosebag, while their drivers form groups of dancing Dervishes, stamping the feet, beating the arms across the chest. Darkly, as with an army encamping, the carts begin to unload.

In a tavern close by, where only market people may be served at such an hour, drivers and market-gardeners are thawing the cold out of themselves with a glass of stiff grog or a cup of boiling tea potently reinforced. In a humbler coffee-shop they fall asleep over their steaming mugs and opened packets of bread and meats. Nondescript nightbirds, feverishly alert, and eagerly sucking at their hot pennorths, emphasise the lassitude of the drivers.

The night fades, the press of carts and waggons grows and grows. In the market itself, in the high-vaulted, sky-lighted central hall, in the cross-passages, round about outside under the overhanging roof, and in many streets near by, shutters are being taken down, crates and boxes are being brought out. Rostrums appear; alert-eyed men mount them, as if about to address a phantom multitude.

Porters burdened with hazardous high piles of baskets hurry down the aisles. Nonchalant men with pocket-book and pencil give "good morning" to comfortable fellows who are busily opening crates,

boxes, baskets, sacks, and displaying their contents.

Here, there, and everywhere vegetables and fruit bud and bloom. The old market lights up gaily with the freshness, the scent of many vague perfumes grows stronger. And always within and without

the market the piles of produce grow and grow.

Then the buyers come sampling, lifting a potato from its sack, a cabbage from its pile, and regarding it knowingly. A question of "Jack" or "Willyam," and down goes an entry in the pocket-book, or Treasury notes pass to the mute preacher in a rostrum.

Within the market all is quiet and orderly. But outside there is a babel. Porters with burdens crying aloud the name of a purchaser, drivers shouting, horses trampling.

One thing you had expected and do not find: the vegetable refuse that in pre-war days quickly littered the cobbles. Though the market still seems a very cornucopia, it is no longer wasteful of its plenty.

You make your way down to the Strand through the flower-market — an arbour of delight, where capacious women squat on baskets, and crave your custom in endearing terms.

. . . . . .

Smithfield began early in the old days. Soon after two of a morning the streets on either side were a blaze of light, and a tumult of horses, carts, and market-men, and inside the market the butchers were sharpening their long knives. But now that "Dora" has plunged us in darkness, and Rhondda has rationed us, it is after six or nearer seven when the real business begins.

But for some time waggons laden with carcases have rattled up to the gates and discharged on to trollies. Now on either side of the gangways the carcases hang upon hooks. Here and there a blue-coat butcher takes a carcase across his knee, and severs downward with a vicious, thrusting stroke that seems like to gash the butcher too. Sometimes it does, and then there is a rush to fudge up an amateur tourniquet, and your butcher is taken prostrate on a trolley, like one of his own carcases, down an underground passage to "Barts."

But the old cutting-days, when it was slash, slash, slash in every booth of the market, are no more. For no meat is sold

retail, and most of it goes off by the carcase, or the quarter—sliced American fashion, so that good English beef is shaped like frozen stuff.

Still there is no sign of scarcity, and, as with the crowd of buyers you tread the saw-dusted ways, you pass grove after grove of dead beeves, with here and there a butcher slicing a carcase carefully in halves. Here is another neatly whittling its skin from a dangling sheep.

Blue-overalled market-men stagger by you carrying the slain, or push a trolley-full with a warning shout. Here one trolley-load topples over, and there is a hasty rally of forces to collect the precious bargain.

Of the old uproar there is none; none of the old chaffering. Each few booths are badged with their special district. The buyer knows his man, has his requisition, and the price is fixed. And the "offal" has, apparently, its own destination, for hardly any is to be seen. There are more policemen than buyers, and a rubicund butcher complains bitterly that he could not

and he would buy a little joint for his own consumption.

. . . . . .

But Billingsgate is still a market. If the ways round Covent Garden and Smithfield are crowded, the ways round Billingsgate are blocked. It seems impossible that this intricate jumble of horse and cart should ever come asunder. The air is heavy with the smell of fish ; the feet slip upon a scaly pavement. The market heralds itself, no less, with a great roar of barter, and a hurrying of fish porters, leather-bonneted, under tottering towers of crates.

And now, borne on the merry confusion of tongues, you pass between piles of fish, scaled and shelled, of all sorts and sizes—cod, plaice, sole, herring, crab, lobster, scallop, and many less familiar. Neptune with a trident hooks great fishes from a tub and flourishes them victoriously. Cods gape at you with red jaws. Soles nestle coyly in ice-barrels. Brass-throated women, the skirt tucked up under the apron, shout inarticulate commendations of their wares. At

the farther end of the market steps go down steeply to an open prospect of the Thames.

Two black-habited nuns stand shyly before a group of brawny salesmen, waiting for the chance of a bargain.

X.—MADAME TUSSAUD'S

FACED by the garish newness of the Marylebone flats, Madame Tussaud's has a homely Middle-Victorian air. A Futurist painter would see, or pretend to see, drifting around its stiff walls and rolling glass roof, the spirit shapes of antimacassars, mahogany furniture, side whiskers, dress-improvers, the Maiden's Prayer, Christy Minstrels, Maskelyne and Cook, the Great Exhibition, respectability, and the Albert Memorial.

There is something brave in its persistence, something innocent in its smug ugliness. It is a relic of an age when men played with the mechanical mimicry of life as with a toy, and had not yet discovered it was a monster.

These reflections flash through your brain as you pause under one of the captive trees rustling and winking gaily in the thin spring

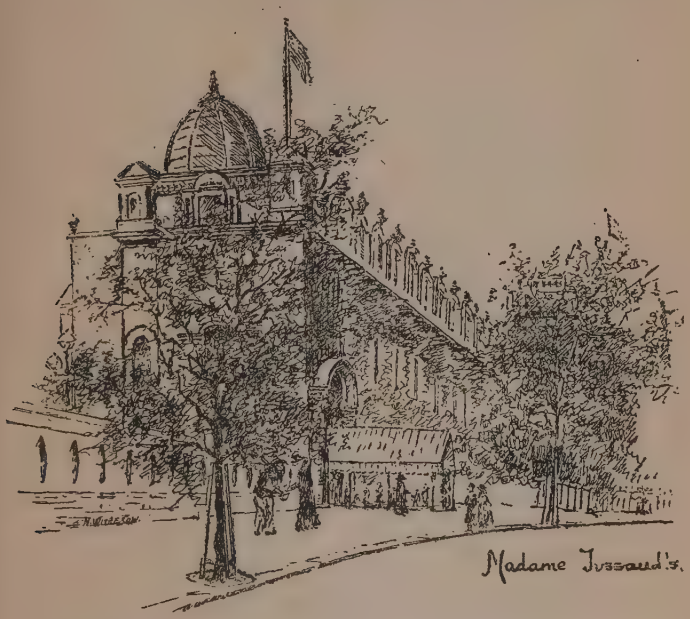
air over the busy pavement. You mount the steps to this crystal palace amid a crowd of spectral Victorians, their faces beaming with a smug contentment. The flesh-and-blood khaki soldiers, ascending and descending, seem strangely out of place.

The entrance hall, with its broad stone stairways mounting to a balcony, is spacious, though there are cheap-jack contrivances about you, and an anachronistic placard invites you to a free cinema show.

On the first floor you halt for a moment at the entrance to the hall of images. Will you be able to recapture that childish thrill you had when you happened on the preliminary policeman lurking at the doorway? Sure enough the thrill comes; and for a moment you see yourself as a very small person drawn away rapidly by a very large person before you can have the pleasure of tugging a policeman by the tunic.

Then the full splendour of the hall bursts upon you, and you stand awestruck. The figures are so imposing, the dresses are so magnificent. It seems as though all the great

ones of the earth had come thither to receive you. You remember that for a moment, before curiosity conquered, you had wanted to run away. Doubtless if a Timbuctooan



strayed herein he would incontinently prostrate himself, murmuring apologies that, owing to the shortage in matches, he had not the wherewithal for a sacrificial fire.

You perceive that, in fact, this is in some

sort a holy of holies—the nearest the Victorians got to a cathedral with its saints enniched within and without its walls (albeit the devils, instead of serving a purpose as gargoyle waterspouts, are sequestered in the basement, and are there the object of most ardent worship). By bad luck the bandstand is for the moment untenanted, and so the final touch is wanting.

There is a great concourse of sightseers, most of them soldiers; and of these very many are from overseas. Only here and there you catch the wide blissful stare of the country cousin who was once the prime visitor to Madame Tussaud's.

The Dominion soldier eyes the wax figures with a glance in which criticism is strangely mingled with respect. These are his ancestors as well as ours, and were stout fellows according to their lights, but the Dominions have gone beyond them. At contemporaries he looks with frank amusement, and, with thumb on catalogue, asks who is this fellow Bernard Shaw. Kipling he has heard of, and he is disappointed by the smallness of the man and

the owl-blink of his spectacles. But he pauses with reverence before Kitchener and Roberts. The figures must have been modelled many years ago, for Kitchener is still fierce, fresh-coloured, and unwrinkled, and "Bobs" is still spry and war-worthy. In particular, before the figure of "Bobs" two scarred veterans from Australia halt for a long time, and mutter a rosary of battles.

Bottomley, very resolute, about to address the nation on a matter of urgency, gets his meed of attention. Flying men and Polar explorers are noticed. But Knox, Wesley, Victor Hugo (very disconsolate at an angle of the gangway), Madame Tussaud herself, black-cloaked and bonneted, watching the Sleeping Beauty, and still more the Kings and Queens from William the Conqueror to

William the Fourth, excite merely the contemptuous comment : "Queer old guys!"

To the schoolboy who accompanies you, however, these Kings and Queens are the prime exhibits. The other folk are too recent to be interesting : nor can he believe that people dressed in so ordinary a fashion can be really historical—that is, legendary. His infallible instinct tells him that English history ended with Elizabeth. Richard the Lion-Heart and Edward the Black Prince are his high heroes. What a big battle-axe the Crusader has! But why isn't Edward in black armour? He notes with much surprise that Queen Mary (bloody Mary, according to the history-books) has a much more pleasing face than Queen Bess.

In the next room you are brought up short before the image of Kaiser Wilhelm. And here, *pardie*! are Franz Josef and Bismarck and Moltke! What are these alien enemies doing cheek by jowl with Tennyson, George Augustus Sala, and G. R. Sims? A tablet informs you that the aliens were, in fact, removed to cold storage, and have been reinstated in

response to a large popular demand. But why not put them in the Chamber of Horrors?

It is to this vault of blood-and-thunder you now descend—passing almost without a glance a medley of instruments of torture and some noble relics of the great Napoleon. Here the show is wonderfully stage-managed. The fact and circumstance of crime are conjured up in graphic tableaux. You might be in the Inferno of another Dante, where lost souls must enact and re-enact for ever the deed of their damnation. Not only may you see the very rope, the very drop, the very jury-box from Old Bailey, not only may you see the benevolent-looking Charles Peace, and this and that famous thief-catcher, but in this crypt and that you may catch a vision—a nursemaid's nightmare got from gluttonous consumption of police reports—in which the shocking deed is given a local habitation and a shape. Yet most shocking of all is the crowd of horrible faces pressing forward against a balustrade. If only the figures had moved, though it had been an eyelid, the horror would have been less.

Two droning, garrulous ciceroni, each followed by a pack, particularise the marvels of the place. Your overstrained nerves gain relief from the quaint humours of these old gentlemen, though you are somewhat annoyed when one of them insists that Stinie Morrison killed his man. But "Leeming by name and Leeming by nature he was" is a gem. You note, too, that the guides have a certain fatherly affection for their exhibits. Nevertheless, disregarding the very door of old Newgate and the something or other of the Bastille, you are glad enough to mount again to the upper storey.

Then you reflect: Why is the Chamber of Horrors the most interesting part of the exhibition? Doubtless murder is in itself of absorbing interest—even if you are not the murderer or the victim. But these old fellows upstairs here murdered, too; and yet you stand unmoved before them. If these fellows were only pictured at their business, now, as those fellows down below-stairs are pictured at theirs! Somewhere in the building, the catalogue tells you, there *are*

historical tableaux; but nobody seems to go there. Are we interested only in modern crime? And are we condemned to see only the sordid side of it because to portray the crimes of more lofty personages would be to risk the clutch of the Law?

Some such thoughts are busy within you as you pause before a fancy group of contemporary politicians—quite ignored by the crowd.

But before you go your eye is caught by one most significant figure. The man is shorter than you had supposed, and slighter. But the features are strongly marked, and the jaw pushes forward with the prominent underlip that names a North of Ireland man. The figure is half-turned from the spectator, and looks towards an empty space, where until quite lately, so a tablet tells you, another figure stood. The eyes of the survivor look into vacancy, and seem to ask a question.

XI.—FLEET STREET

WALKING east from what once was Temple Bar, and is now a somewhat painful statue, you notice a sudden change in the feeling of the street. It is a feeling you get farther west in patches—in certain lanes, before certain taverns where actors congregate. But here the feeling holds you from the Temple to "King Lud." It is a feeling you get in any village. I once said that London is a city containing millions of tourists and no inhabitants. I was wrong. The journalist inhabits Fleet Street; whether he converses, as here and there in casual groups, or saunters lightly, or rushes at fever speed, he is at home.

You know a journalist when you see him; yet his appearance is difficult to define. These brisk, gay fellows here before "The Cock" are reporters; and they look half

actor, half detective. These melancholy men before a tea-shop are sub-editors; they look as if somebody had hit them violently on the crown of the head, and they were slowly recovering. This dapper fellow walking solitary, with an attempt at a thoughtful air, is an editor. He looks like a commercial traveller, as, in fact, he is; he travels in views. These trim young things are women journalists, but as yet they bear no trademark; they might be engaged, for all their looks betray them, on work of national importance.

Gradually another feeling seizes you. For a time you cannot name it. Then a vision of a Smith's bookstall passes before your eyes: and you are looking across the street at the names blazoned upon the house-fronts. And then indeed you glow.

Here are names you have seen thousands of times before in print at the top of a newspaper, and you had come to believe that *The Daily Squib*, for example, *was* a number of folded sheets of paper defiled with printer's ink, and nothing more. Now you know the wildness of your error. *The Daily Squib* is

a person; it has a body—there it is across the street, clad in a section of dingy brick; and it has a soul, a soul you guess at now from the faces round you.

And now there is magic enough in the street. Opinions, news, criticisms, seem to float round you; leader-writers seem to lean out of windows as from a pulpit to address the crowd on the urgency of the situation; the spider-web of lines topping the street vibrate with as yet unpublished telegrams from Our Special Correspondent; your mind's eye pierces the dingy brickwork to visualise a pale-browed editor closeted with his conscience, and getting the better of it in a vigorous Græco-Roman encounter.

Nay, more! On every house-front there is a muster-roll of famous names, each house, each storey, is a hive of news and views. The dangling capital letters hang as thickly as on the walls of that Welsh hostelry whose title ran round and round the house and stretched away into the woods to serve as a guide to wandering travellers. Are there so many newspapers in the world? Are there

sufficient readers in the world to go round and leave a margin for fresh adventurers?

To tread the Street and taste the flavour of it is almost, but not quite, enough. You have a vague, hopeless desire to pass

the magic portals and see a newspaper at its work. Hopeless? Nonsense! I touch you with my magic staff (a composing-stick, by the way), and, hey presto! you are invisible, and in condition to face the fiercest commissionaire.

To your surprise you find yourself drawn away from the main street and down a side alley. So far you have looked on the dens of London editors of provincial papers, or the offices of publishers and advertising managers. Fleet Street does not wear its heart upon its sleeve. But down here you may hear its heart-beat; for the Evenings are at their first edition, and the printing-presses throb.

You mount the steps of a building that looks something like a bank and something like a Town Hall. You glide easily past a stern commissionaire who is placing a printed slip and a pencil before a timorous young fellow with a foolscap envelope in his hand. You catch a glimpse of a crowded waiting-room, of one of many whizzing lifts. The next moment you are upstairs in a long

room, whose door, swinging to behind you, shuts off the clatter of machinery. At long desks sit a number of fellows with rumpled hair, their thick pencils flying swiftly over copy paper. Now and again the door opens to let in a sudden rattle and clank and an inky little boy, who makes a dart at one of the writers, seizes a handful of "copy" or deposits a slim oblong of printed paper, and is gone. Now and again a fellow rushes in headlong, seizes copy paper and carbon, and is instantly in the throes of composition. Now and again one tears off a last sheet, flings down his pencil, lights his pipe afresh, and joins a group who are lounging in the corner. Now the telephone rings, and Mr. —— incontinently seeks the News Editor.

You follow him. In a small, bright room sits an alert, sharp-featured young man and a girl typist. The News Editor's desk foams with paper. In two words Mr. —— is told to go to Katmandoo; he must catch the next train from Victoria. He is to get in touch with the rebels, and wire a special

account for Monday's paper. The News Editor slashes out a paragraph from a daily paper, hands it over, and Mr. —— is gone to Katmandoo.

In the Sub-Editor's room the activity is more restrained and more continuous than with the reporters. Two long tables filled with Subs. The Chief Sub at the short cross table. Most of them are busy with "flimsies" from the News Agencies, some are blue-pencilling fresh copy with what you suspect to be a malicious smile. The paste-pot, too, is busy, and the shears. There is a constant cry of "Boy!" a constant procession of boys, or girls, to the automatic shoot up which cartridges full of copy rush to the composing-room, from which cartridges full of proofs rattle into a wirework basket.

In the composing-room, filled with a bewildering clatter—rows on rows of funny little machines with the keys of a typewriter in front. Sure enough before each of them a man in his shirt sleeves sits tapping. Unseen by you, blobs of hot metal are falling

into shapes decided by the nerves of the machine, and little strips of metal type are being disgorged. Here you see the strips being put together in a frame; here a roller is being passed over a strip of paper lying on the inked type; here a proof is being thrust into the tube. Here a whole page of type is being taken down to be cast in the foundry.

And down below stairs are the presses, hard at work with the second edition. Alighting after a sudden downward flight on a hazardous gallery platform, you find yourself looking at a huge, clanking, growling monster swallowing a stretch of paper from a great roll, passing it over this roller and that, sending it finally to kiss a roller faced all round with type rising from a metal bed. Many inky rollers revolve, and shuttle to and fro. Creeping gingerly to the end of the gallery, you see a flood of printed paper rushing down a shoot, and appearing at the foot of it as folded copies of *The Evening Wail.* Quires of them go up a shoot continually to the publisher.

But the noise and confusion deafens, oppresses, the smell of printer's ink sickens. You are eager for the street and the quiet of it. And outside you find confusion worse confounded. A gabble of many tongues; boys on bicycles, boys in carts, boys on foot, all throwing parcels of newspapers from hand to hand, and all shouting. Swift offshoots fly from the eddy crying the news, carts and bicycles dash off. Already at the upper end of the alley you see men ladling out the second ("the City") edition.

And at night, when Fleet Street is a shuttered silence, there in many an alleyway a greater tumult arises. For the Dailies have gone to press, and not only is there a fleet of all manner of wheeled and crawling things come to feed the London trade, but the paper's own motor-cars are packed, and pawing for a start to catch the country trains. With a rush they are gone, at what a speed none may say, for, by the mercy of heaven and the good sense of the Force, there are no police traps for the newspaper motors flashing through the empty midnight streets.

XII.—RICHMOND AND THE RIVER

THE Thames at London is unknown to most Londoners, save as a thing they bridge over in a bus or a tram on their way to and from their work. Below the bridges it is used indifferently well by shipping; between the bridges a few stray tugs and barges have it at their will. The gay Richmond river, with its throng of skiffs, becomes the somewhat dingier and less frequented stream at Kew, and then takes a dive in among factories, burrows underground, as it were, or—shall we say?—travels incognito in a mask of mud, until it suddenly reappears, old, grey, but very majestic, in the salt, wide reaches of the sea.

And, down there, the aborigines renounce the fatherhood of Thames. They are "On Sea," and prefer to look asquint at a barren

patch of dirty billows rather than to gaze straight before them at the most illustrious river in the world.

So that if I ask you to "come on the river," you will not expect to be taken for a spin in a lighterman's skiff between Westminster and Greenwich. Are you theatrical or aristocratic? You will expect a luncheon at "Skindles," and a jaunt on the upper reaches. Are you democratic? You will expect Richmond. And, apart from the more tremendous moments of the Thames, when it flows huge and masterful under its bridges, there is nothing in the Valley so wonderful as Richmond, its Hill, its Park, and its holiday stream.

Walking from the station you note that here is a country town, within bow-shot of London, still too proud to sink into a suburb. The winding streets have the sort of atmosphere, of self-centred business, proper to a country town; and when you turn off the High Street and debouch upon the spacious Green, with its toy cannon and its immaculately calm square of private houses, you

At Greenwich.

might well believe yourself a hundred miles from London.

Through an ancient gateway, past a Tudor mansion, between walls of Tudor brick, down a lane—Tudor brick on one side and comely Victorian cottages on the other—you come at last to a sight of the river. A slip of green, a sparkle of water, trees waving heavily beyond! The next moment the lane gives you up, and the river has you. Inevitably the eyes turn to the left and follow the sweep of the river to where Richmond Bridge leaps across it with exultant arches, and the foliage and houses of Richmond Hill mount into a proud crown above river and arch.

Fleets of boats fret the curve of the near bank, stray skiffs dot the water; trees on the farther side toss their plumes jauntily in the blue, or bend over with an eager rustle to watch their shadows shifting in the dappled, twisting shimmer of the stream. In the middle distance the near bank has the comfortable untidiness of a country riverside; you are walking into a foreground of promenade well-frequented, of gravel and lawn.

As you near the bridge the crowd thickens, and the voice of the boatman is heard in the

land. Boat-houses with a dim vista of curving timbers yawn to the left of you. When you

are past the bridge you cannot move for foot passengers, and the boatmen buzz like mosquitoes. Sooner or later you succumb.

Doubtless you are provided with a female companion. Nowhere is woman more necessary than in a skiff. She may steer badly, but anyhow she will be content to steer until you ask her not to. If you take a man he will want to row all the time. Besides, there is no doubt that a woman looks well at the end of a boat, as the old carvers of figure-heads could have told you. Especially, it is pleasant, when you are sculling, and getting rather hot and dishevelled in the process, to look aft at a miracle of neatness, coolness, and ease. I dare say I could find other reasons; these may suffice.

You enter the skiff. . . . And here it should be noted that you are not in boating-flannels. In pre-war time you would have been so, under pain of hard glances, cynical smiles, and a general sense of being a blot on the landscape. To-day the boot is on the other leg, or, rather, the leg is in quite

another trouser. For, to be fashionable, you must give the impression of having rushed down by express from between two spells of fierce war-work. If you had time to change into flannels you are a slacker. But most of the male scullers are in khaki.

By this time, showing all your airs and graces, you have manœuvred your boat clear of the fleet, and are crawling past the crowded bank. Having lately been in the crowd you try to convince yourself that you are not as conspicuous a figure as you feel.

With stroke after stroke of the sculls, Richmond Hill takes on new wonders, massing as grandly as the castled steep of Knaresborough, and green with leafage to the brow —where a fragment of the old "Star and Garter" is still to be seen, though a vandal housebreaker has jettisoned the main pile (probably because all the stars go to Maidenhead nowadays, and the rest of the title is obsolete).

Now you are slipping between green meadows, past an island, past another—famous in song and story for the Eel Pies

you cannot get there. And now, with a tremendous effort of sculls and the imagination, because I must cram many reaches into one paragraph, you are flying past the Teddington Weir, past Kingston, rather frowzy, and so to the gay houseboats and trim Tudor esplanade of Hampton Court. The houseboats have already broken out into flower and petticoat. Idle men and women (yes, and the men are in boating-flannels!) lounge on deck-chairs. Melodious gramophones, sounding at their very best over the water, give you the latest tinkle from the revues. The season has started early; but then any houseboat is a port in an air raid.

If you are true river-folk, by this time the thirst for the shadowy delight of a backwater will have possessed you; and somewhere or another you will slip into shadow and calm. Here, tied to the bank, you will loll upon cushions, swaying with the swaying boat, listening to the gluck-gluck of the water, and watching my lady performing dainty conjuring feats with an electric kettle and a teapot.

St Paul's.
Lambeth Palace.

(In the old days a spirit-stove served the purpose; but, alas! methylated spirit is no more.) Do you know the joys of tea and cucumber sandwiches when the sun is very hot, and the shadow of the backwater is very cool?

If you are a person of great strength of mind and of little serenity you may tear yourself from Elysium to explore the pleasances of Hampton Court—its gorgeous flower-gardens, its rustic park, its elegant, water-lilied canal, not to mention its antique cloisters and corridors, and its gay gallery of pictures. Otherwise you will linger in your secluded nook until the sunlight thins to silver, until the rustle of the leaves becomes a lullaby, until the shadows of the backwater become black and velvety, and the patches of broken sky seen through the leafy screen tone down from purple to softest grey.

You have little strength of mind, let us hope, yet your business drives you to an early exile from your Paradise. So you are back at Richmond in broad daylight, the current and the tide, together, taking you

with an easy swiftness. On the way you guess rather than observe that courtship is swift in a single sculler, and that Cupid wears khaki, and has been to the wars.

Up through the gardens you mount along cunningly curving ways. If you are wise you remember Lot's wife, and do not look back until you have gained the summit. And then! oh, then you will vow that nowhere in England is a scene so fair. Nowhere such a height and depth and distance of greenness. Nowhere such a magical, far-off, deep-down glimpse of silver stream, and of green meadow beyond, and, again beyond, of blue hill. When you are ten, twenty years older, you will come to sit on a bench up there and watch the silly, eager ants away down below clawing with their antennæ at the shining water.

But now, having still youth—of a sort—you wander along London's most wonderful promenade, the promenade on the brow of Richmond Hill. Here is the intimacy and merry chatter of the crowd, the sense of town and settled ways. And yet the wide expanse

of the river valley in green and silver falls sheer away from you, and great winds buffet your wing-feathers. So you salute the eternal earth and sky from your terrace-walk, and thank God you are in England.

Enter into the natural wilderness of the Park, and you will find England in another mood. But it is twilight by now, the figures of your fellow-promenaders are black silhouettes, the lower sky beyond the river is orange and crimson, the upper sky is a crystal grey, and the laughter and chatter of the crowd are the voices of disembodied spirits calling you to TEA. You find Tea down the Hill towards the High Street—in a "Snuggery," or a "Coserey," or some such place, lit with red-shaded lamps, furnished with padded couches and a band, garnished with toasted scones, war-time cakes, flirtation, and with the tea itself—stewed (Heaven forgive the management!) since the Creation.

XIII.—A FIRST NIGHT

THERE is a swarm of taxis before the theatre, but many gaily dressed women come walking, with their khaki or tan-coloured escorts, from the Tube. Nay, more! *Annus mirabilis!* here steps one gorgeous flutterer out of a very bus. But from the frown on her face, and the vigour wherewith she shakes her plumes, it would seem that virtue is not here its own reward. Gorgeous flutterers, however, are rarer than they were, and many of the women wedged in the crowd between the theatre doorposts are in civilian or military tailor-mades. The military ladies strut.

The foyer is packed; it is a reception. Here is that merry, excited buzz and chatter of social life you find almost nowhere else to-day in England. Obviously, and naturally, not the play but the festival is the

thing. Madame Drama is At Home, and shares the usual fate of hostesses.

A number of belated strangers are trying to buy tickets at the box-office. Serene in the possession of a complimentary ticket, you smile at the sight of good money turned away. There is, in fact, but little money in the house to-night, for the manager believes in having his premises well papered.

All the people round you are deadheads. You know many of them, and all of them have that unmistakable air of possessing the theatre. The few paying guests edge furtively through the crowd, answer the challenge of a commissionaire, and disappear into the circle or the stalls.

The men you know are mostly critics; the women you recognise are mostly stars. The stars radiate light, perfume, and laughter, their dainty confections advertising the amount of their salaries. The critics exhibit, as a rule, a comfortable, dignified shabbiness. Few of them are in evening dress; though, indeed, to have claimed the

privileges of war-time and skipped the painful metamorphosis from grub to butterfly is not the distinctive hall-mark of a critic.

But two critics are splendid. One has the splendour of a Regency Buck. "Who is that man?" whisper the awed uninitiated, as the yard-long, haughty, languid lily hovers above them. The other has the splendour of a super-shopwalker. "Hang it all!" growls a critic, as the Presence passes, "Blank's a disgrace to the profession. He looks almost like a gentleman." One poor critic, new to the job, has got into the office dress-suit, and it covers him in waves of broadcloth.

There are a few theatre managers, patently prosperous. One is a short, thick-set man, in evening kit, an American jaw, and a turn-down collar, who has just come to earth between two flights of strenuous business. Another is a Colossus, well-groomed and smoothed down, with luminous eyes fixed on vacancy and an air of slumbering passion. A third, soft and southern, shrinking, yet overbold, makes constant play with eye and

lips, and bows and curvets like a dancing-master. But the centre and meaning of the scene is a shortish fellow, his prominent hook-nose punctuating his eager gestures, and bosked on head and cheek and lip and chin with the most wonderful foliage. He has come to see that the company wears his wigs aright. It rarely does.

The chatter is not mainly theatrical. You catch a phrase about meat, another about the scandalous embargo on petrol, another about air raids, while several groups, including your own, are busy discussing the latest news from the front.

At the gallery entrance and the pit long queues are waiting. The word queue has gained an evil meaning of late, but the gallery queue on a first night is a magical affair. There are no deadheads, no bored critics, no carping rivals. These eager faces, waiting an hour or more in the chill of the evening, have the true dramatic fire. There is an air of almost feverish anticipation. Satisfaction is more apparent, of course, at the head of the queue; and the two flap-

pers and one young soldier, encamped upon the doorstep, glow. If you have a place in the queue you will find that the gossip is altogether of plays and players. The men talk of the latest revue, or the latest Barrie, or the latest Pinero. The women talk of actresses and music-hall favourites. There is not much speculation on the coming play; that is a mystery, let it remain so till the curtain rises; but the Stage for the past twenty years is put under review; and one old fellow, insolently parading his wealth of experience, laments our present decadence, and sighs for the days of Henry Irving, Wyndham, Bancroft, and Nelly Farren.

After many false starts and closings up of fours, the entrances to gallery and pit have swung open. There is a breathless struggle past the pay-box, a scamper up the stairs or down the stairs; and now you tramp into the echoing theatre, and are gazing before you, or down below you, at the empty stalls. The chatter of conversation begins again. Some of your companions take out books and newspapers, and settle themselves to

read away the time. But some of the best talk in town may be heard in a first-night gallery before the curtain goes up.

Gradually the stalls fill; and now you are all attention. Every now and then there is a burst of clapping when some established favourite sails into view. She (it is nearly always a she) bows with a grace that a queen might envy, as she loosens her wraps, and sinks daintily into her stall.

Attendants on the pounce fly hither and thither fluttering programmes; opera-glasses make the circuit of the view. The orchestra stumbles up from below the stage. The house is packed, almost every stall is occupied, there is no standing room at the back of gallery and pit.

Another loud burst of applause, and the

conductor is bowing to the audience. He taps with his baton, and the band starts with a first-night fervour. A bell rings—once, twice. The band stops, the lights go down. In the gallery and the pit there is a breathless silence. In the stalls a few late-comers struggle to rest. The curtain rises. A new play begins to be born. . . .

The first-act curtain has fallen with a tumultuous burst of applause. The principal performers, looking happier than they feel, have taken half a dozen calls; and now you are back in the foyer again—or the lounge—tearing the first act to pieces. A soldierly-looking old critic, slightly and charmingly pompous, who has Mr. Weller's recipe for laughing internally, puts the thing in its right place with a few irresistible epigrams; (but you know he will be kinder in the morning paper). Comment is controlled, however, by the sudden apparition of a spick-and-span young gentleman—the Press agent—who hales the critics off to the manager's snuggery for more drinks at the house's expense.

In the gallery and the pit the public sits cramped during the long wait. The sole amusement is to pick out notorieties in the stalls. Such of these as have not been hailed at entry take care to catch the public eye by buzzing from acquaintance to acquaintance, leaning over the back of a stall, eyeing the tiers of spectators, smiling with teeth and tiara. Presently the gods tire of such amusement, and start clapping and stamping. The noise goes on till the band strikes up for the next act.

As the final act shows signs of drooping towards its *dénouement* the bustle of diving for wraps and overcoat grows. When the curtain falls, half of those who were in the stalls are on their way to the exits. But there they pause, for the thunder of clapping hands grows imperative. Again and again the leading lady and gentleman advance hand in hand, bowing and beaming; again and again the applause breaks into ecstasy at the sight of them. Secondary persons are had on, too, and acclaimed. But the audience is not satisfied. It is the author it

wants; and hoarse cries for him are heard above the hurricane of hands. Finally the curtain runs up and discloses a pale, nervous fellow in evening dress, wondering what on earth hands and arms were made for, and mopping and mowing at the audience with a ghastly grin.

Even that is not all. Having gloated over the sight of him, the audience insists that he shall speak—why, Heaven knows, since he has been speaking to them all the evening. Still, he speaks. He says how happy he is, and how proud he is; and then he makes nervous motions towards the wings, stands for a moment silent and unutterably shy, and so is curtained from our ken.

Then there is more applause. It would appear you have just seen a masterpiece.

As you go up the stairs to the front of the house you hear somebody say: "I'll give it four weeks"; and somebody else reply: "Without the option."

XIV.—PARLIAMENT

THERE are a few idlers outside the gateways to Palace Yard. The policemen on duty eye them with studied indifference; but when an enfranchised taxi sweeps past them, a hand goes up to the salute. More frequently it is a foot-passenger that gets the greeting. Many notorious persons, posing zealously for their portraits, let you see more plainly than ever the burden of Empire on their backs as they return the attention. Most of them walk briskly, as from one urgent task to another. A bundle of documents is *de règle*.

At the entrance to Westminster Hall and the public lobby you are stopped by a policeman. The hour is early, and entry is not yet free to the vulgar. You have an appointment, however, with your own special representative, and press on. The same

plea takes you through what was once the House of Commons into the Lobby. At present it is dark and deserted, yielding upon yawning corridors. The statues of old Parliamentary leaders in heroic attitudes and comic tailoring have a funereal air. A few policemen lounge about disconsolately. Two officers in khaki are striving vainly to debauch a sergeant into a promise of a seat in the Gallery.

When your member arrives, very rosy and beaming, he finds you in Westminster Hall, attached to a battalion of schoolgirls, and listening to mangled history retailed by a friendly policeman. You are inclined to doubt if Charles the Martyr did actually stand just there at his trial, when you are further informed that Oliver Cromwell, the regicide, subsequently suffered the same fate as his victim. Your member arrives in time to reassure you and to let the gay light of his humour play on the dry, historic fact.

He takes you to the crypt, with its marvellous ceiling. He shows you where Miss

Davison hid herself to escape the Census, and where Guy Fawkes deposited his infernal fireworks. He shows you where a later Fenian Fawkes gave a brave policeman the chance to outshine King James. He shows you where Oliver signed the death-warrant of Charles, and passed it through a window.

Swiftly you pass through many magic chambers—where the members hang up their hats, where they eat, where they study. You pass stray members caught in the act of indolence, and angered by the unrehearsed publicity. You have passed through the Library with a hush, because here the members' brains are busily working, and maybe the fate of Empire depends upon their labour. And now you are at the bar of the House itself, a silent and deserted House, impressing you strangely with the ghostly emptiness of its leathern-upholstered benches. Your guide explains that you are not yet actually in the House, and that if you put one foot over the edge of the carpet outraged members will cry loudly, "Order!

Order!" For the privileges of the House are such.

Then, taking heart of grace, you step forward, and seat yourselves on the Government and Opposition benches. Your member goes towards a table which spans the floor. It is packed with volumes, which are flanked in front by two ponderous, metal-clamped boxes. These, it appears, are the famous "dispatch-boxes," and on one or the other of them have leant, as your member now leans, all the famous leaders of the Commons—the Pitts, father and son, Burke, Fox, Canning, Gladstone, Disraeli, Chamberlain, Balfour, Asquith—and Lloyd George. Here this and that great speech was delivered while the House sat spellbound, or burst, at the close of some tremendous period, into frantic applause.

You gaze curiously at the galleries and the ladies' grille (one little girl commenting that it is nothing like St. Lawrence's, which she saw in the crypt); you gaze reverentially at the Speaker's empty throne, and then pass behind it, and out of the House to fresh

wonders—to a sight of the lobbies, where members, dividing, walk before the omniscient tellers, after due obeisance to the spirits of the place, and so ultimately to the spangled glories of the House of Lords.

Every place has its memory, every name evoked is illustrious, every echo of the pavement is an echo of England's greatness.

So you have done with the past, and are hurried to the more august and tremendous present. You are, by special favour, to stand in the Members' Lobby when the Speaker comes in procession to the House. The Members' Lobby is fairly full, and everybody is busily talking. A thick-set fellow, with vehement eyes and a bristling, whitening beard starting forward from between a bowler hat and a turn-down collar, jerks abruptly, the hands in the pockets, from group to group. A man of similar build, but with the face of a discomforted schoolboy, hides behind the tall, slim body of a proper young man, who masks the polite alertness of his face with a pair of heavily rimmed spectacles. A chief inspector,

very brisk yet very sedate, very fierce yet very happy, sends a spike of his waxed moustache and a glance of his calm eye into every corner of the Lobby. You are marshalled into line—two policemen for markers. The super-waiters, lounging in chairs before you on the farther side of the apartment, gather themselves together.

"Hats off, strangers!" cries the chief inspector in a defiant shout that lingers into sing-song; and off comes *his* hat. The buzz of conversation stops. The super-waiters rise to attention. The Lobby is silent. Very silently an elegant, sombre little procession passes before you, and vanishes through the gaping portals of the House. It is gone so swiftly that you have no time to note more than the glory of the mace, the calm dignity of the heavily bewigged Speaker, the superhuman dignity of his skirt-bearers, the neat, twinkling blackness of the procession's calves.

It is yet too early to seek admittance to the Gallery, for the members are too shy to let the public see them at their prayers. So you return to the public lobby, and find it

quite translated. It is bright and busy. It has an air of frantic excitement. Round about the entry to the holy of holies the public buzzes and swarms, fluttering visiting-cards in the face of an impervious policeman. To all and sundry the policeman dispenses a larger coloured card that must be filled in before a member can be approached. Now and again he cries aloud the name of a member whose privacy has been successfully assailed; and, as he cries, the member comes bustling. Instantly one fly, many flies dart at him. He bows his important brow to their inquiries, and walks away with them to a corner where the less fortunate may not overhear his confidential disclosures. . . . One or two Irish members, dangerously calm, produce forthwith the Order Form for the Gallery, which is the true objective of each and every interview, and assure the deputation that "you know me! Wait for the debate!"

Craning your neck over the ruck of the crowd, you gaze down a brilliantly lighted corridor at the dim vista of the Members'

Lobby. Beyond that is the House; and the House is full now, and with all its magical stir of business, of which all the stir around you is but the offshoot, the back-wash, it seems now quite unattainable.

But you have an order in your pocket, and the hour approaches. Presently you line up at the narrow door that leads to the Gallery. A policeman, who has been eyeing you casually through the glass panel, looks out at the Lobby clock, seems inclined to doubt the evidence, but opens the door. You press forward, like a crowd at a first night, but not so orderly. Two constables stay you, scrutinise passes, grudgingly allow you to spring, one by one, up the stone stairway. Upstairs you are challenged by a super-waiter, who takes your order, and tells you to enter your particulars, as he recites them solemnly, in a big book. You creep past him, more awed than ever, and are aware, as one ahead opens a door, of a thin trickle of sound. The next moment you are in the Commons Gallery.

At first you think you have come in, most

unfortunately, at an interval. The House is packed; but is anything going on? Away in the darkness of his throne the Speaker sits like an allegorical figure of Silence. Three bewigged figures drowse at his feet, with their heads on the book-piled table. On the forefront of the table glitters the mace. On the Government and Opposition Front Benches members recline at an acute angle, blissfully surrendered to boredom. The slim, proper young man stands with a foot on the Speaker's throne, beaming at the House through his thick-rimmed spectacles.

But in the gallery facing you the reporters are busy, and the thin little trickle of sound goes on. At length you place it. A well-groomed, energetic-looking man stands just behind the Government Front Benches, speaking placidly from his notes. These he taps from time to time with humpsti-bumpsti violence. As he sits down there is a low volley of Parliamentary cheering.

Incontinently the House all but empties, though two other members have risen, and one has remained erect to speak in an even

thinner trickle of confidential gossip. Of the members that remain, some lean over the back of their bench and whisper to the row behind; others read correspondence, others sleep. Momentarily you expect a rubicund old gentleman on the Front Opposition Bench to snore.

But the reporters opposite are still busy. And you do not know what to make of it all when you read in the evening paper, "Great excitement in the House of Commons. Spirited debate."

XV.—SUNDAY

NIGHT after night the City is evacuated. Yet then either darkness cloaks the solitude or the moon gives to every shadow a soul. Even of a Saturday afternoon the City is alive, if only as a thoroughfare. But of a Sunday you walk among the tombstones erected to the memory of the financial departed. Church bells chime mournfully or with hysterical, cackling hilarity. The churches, mostly huddling shamefaced behind office blocks, twiddle their thumbs, and dream of what they were when City folk lived in the City. In street after street of impervious stone you will meet not one solitary wayfarer. Then you will pass a stray soldier—probably from the Dominions—eyeing the house-fronts with a lazy curiosity, and maybe comparing this deserted City with other deserted cities

out in France. Then, with a burst of song, a group of invaders from beyond Aldgate Pump drifts past. Then, with a huge rattle, if you are on a main street, a motor-bus

rushes a riot of life through the waste, rollicks off, snorting disdainfully, and leaves you all the more absolutely alone. A sleek cat crosses the empty carriage-way with deliberate composure.

Farther west the streets are not so empty, but they are working at low pressure, and the foot-passengers in glad raiment seem to have strayed there by accident, for half the shops are shuttered and all of them are shut. Here and there a forlorn damsel gazes at the fenced treasures. But as you draw near to café-land the stream of foot-traffic grows, and between the Circus and the Square, on the northern side of the street at least, khaki and frou-frou fill the pavement. There is a continued challenge of bright eyes, a constant clatter of tongue, rising to a ripple of laughter. Restaurant and café doors stand invitingly open, cinema palaces flaunt their wares—for the benefit of a charity, no doubt.

The crowd is very like that which perambulates in the weekday darkness of Dora, yet there is a difference. There are nervous young fellows in elegant lounge suits, conscious of their careful and unaccustomed spruceness. Here are maidens in fine feathers which have patiently rested for six days in lavender that they might work their

magic more surely on the seventh. And you feel, though perhaps the impression is fallacious, that the crowd is a trifle more homeless than on other days. You feel that the English have not yet learnt how to lounge in broad daylight without being a little ashamed. This and that smart Belgian officer, this and that foreign coiffeur or waiter, sleek and voluble, alone have the trick of it.

The "tea-house cafés" are full of modest people seeing life. They dub every fellow with longish hair an artist or an artiste, every girl with shortish skirts an "artisan." There is no such magic—cheap, if you will, but genuine—in the gilded restaurants where staff officers and the owners of munition factories take their modest eight-course meal.

All day long Petticoat Lane is thronged. Little is sold there that you cannot get in another quarter, but there is such a wealth of nondescript farings on the stalls, there is such a medley of nondescript merchants behind them, of nondescript customers

swarming round them, and the noise of chaffering rises to such a delirious pitch of cacophony that Petticoat Lane is unique. It has another special quality you may find in other Ghettoes, but nowhere else in the Western Hemisphere—I mean that frank, eager joy in the process of bargaining. The merchant, hook-nosed or flat-nosed, with thick blubber lips, flat hands winnowing the empty air, seems sorry when you rise to his falling price, and the priceless commodity, a bar of soap maybe, or a plush mantle, or a box of evil-smelling cigars, is sold.

In all the streets round the Lane Jewry holds high festival. Nowhere else will you see such a mingling of the elegant, the ready-made, and the frankly shabby. Nowhere else is there such open pride in tailoring, nowhere else does the prime handiwork of "the only cutter in this street who is paid £12 a week" rub shoulders so democratically with the salvage from the dust-heaps. But the bowler hats stuck on wide ears and thin necks make you shudder. Khaki, of course, is plentiful; but so is

civilian dress. Bright-eyed Jewish girls move with Oriental grace, fat Jewish women waddle. The fried-fish shops and, at favoured hours, the bars are stuffed with custom. Cockles may be had of the stall-keepers at modest prices. In the byways Jewry sits on the doorstep and sings sad songs.

In the streets of Whitechapel you have passed one or two coster girls in gorgeous feather hats, and as you go eastwards down the Mile End Road or the Commercial Road you pass more and more of them. But not so many as of old, nor is the plush mantle so common. Most of the girls are quietly and elegantly dressed, though you will still find them in the side-streets squatting on the doorstep or grouped in the doorway for the usual Sunday conversation—carried on sometimes by wireless from house to house or across the breadth of the carriage-way. Some of the men lounging with them are in their shirt-sleeves, but all of them (except the soldiers) wear stiff white collars or neat soft ones fastened in front

with a golden pin. In one street a soldier with a cigarette stuck in the far corner of his mouth is galloping a concertina through the Latest. Every street is littered with children.

Other sounds of music grow louder as you turn a corner and see, at the far end of the street, a band of brightly uniformed Salvationists capering earnestly in the middle of a crowd. The music stops, and a grey-haired captain prays fervently, cap in hand, his rugged, simple face, with the eyes closed and the features working, turned to the heavens.

The churches and chapels are mostly empty (this is no prerogative of the East End), though here and there a popular preacher or an ornate service has drawn a crowd. In many a chapel the solemn deacons, who take round the plate, the choir girls, and a few women form the congregation. The pulpit eloquence arouses mournful echoes from the empty pews. Some of the Catholic churches are packed, though many of the English members of the con-

From the
Crystal Palace.

gregation (there is a strong foreign element) seem to follow the service with difficulty. Here, for the first time, you find many soldiers at church. They are mostly French or Belgian.

St. Paul's has a good catch of fishes—many British soldiers among them. One or two of the West-End churches have their usual fashionable audiences. But as a rule the churches are desolately empty, and the services are low-spirited.

Here, there, and everywhere, on waste places of the East End, and on desirable building plots in the suburbs, middle-aged and old men and young women are hard at work on their allotments. Some have put up neat little wooden shanties on their plots, or have clubbed together for a shanty, and drink tea, made over an oil-stove, between two bouts of strenuous digging. The scent of the upturned earth and the sight of bared arms and flushed faces refreshes you after a somewhat dreary Sabbath pilgrimage. Most of the diggers wear their oldest clothes, and flaunt the earthy stains on them; but some

of the tiptop suburbs sport immaculate allotment kit — high boots and breeches, for male and female alike. Nearly all the potatoes are in, but wheelbarrows come trundling with fresh supplies of mysterious vegetables. One lazybones, who has only dug half his allotment, vows he intends to lay out a tennis-court on the other half. Less venturesome and more fortunate people dig in their own gardens, or potter about with fantastic trellis-work.

In many a munition factory the machines go all day long. And in many a quiet house tired munition workers and sluggard office folk drowse away the day.

But in field and forest London is afoot. From an early hour the Sunday bus service has been busy. Bus after packed bus has rocked through the streets and rushed away panting into the open. The train service to Hampstead is overtaxed. In Tubes and trains to Richmond and the Forest there is no standing room. The Spaniards' Walk at Hampstead is another Richmond Hill, where

soldiers and flappers stroll, flirt, and congregate. On all the benches and scattered over the grass, if the weather has been dry, flirtation progresses by easy stages, from the first casual reference to the fineness of the day. In the gardens of the three old inns of Hampstead Heath, and in all the bars, London and Australia quench their thirst.

Many sedate parties take a bus to its country terminus (a dusty, nerve-racking ride), have a quiet tea, an hour's stroll, and then ride home again. Others, more enterprising, walk across country from one bus terminus to another, with an incomprehensible map of the district carried like a talisman in the pocket. You surprise the Londoner on a Sunday (or, rather, two Londoners) in all sorts of out-of-the-way places, in lanes, on heaths and commons. When he is afoot—especially when there is a family of him, with fractious children attached—he looks tired and thirsty; but mostly he is lying on the turf, and you get the impression that he was carried

there and dumped. Nevertheless, you find him up to time for the last bus, very bright and frisky, and more than ready to regale the journey home with broken melodies.

XVI.—THE SECOND-HAND BOOK-STALLS

YOU can tell the age of a town pretty nearly by its second-hand bookshops and bookstalls. In no brick-and-tile bivouac of factory-hands, for example, will you find anything to compare with the noble second-hand bookshops of Paris and the magnificent rubbish of her Quais. And though to-day we are less bookish in the true sense than the Parisians, yet we, too, have monuments to our literary antiquity. Of late, alas! some of the monuments have been overthrown.

Every bookman lamented the sweeping away by Modern Improvement of that rookery of streets nestling beside St. Mary's of the Strand. For there, in a gloom and a grime befitting its mystery, the worship of old books had been carried on from black-letter times.

There were horrors, too, hid in the darkness, but what we like to remember are the huge tomes in blackened leather, with yellowing, brown-spotted, worm-eaten leaves, and displaying quaint cuts, gorgeous initial letters, and even illuminations glowing and golden. The best of these treasures were in the darkness of the shops, but toothsome quartos, octavos, duodecimos, and even smaller fry were spread invitingly on the stalls outside. You, and others of your kind, buzzed like bees before every stall, gathering honey for nothing, and tasting what you stored.

The shopkeeper, seated generally on a stool by the door, and reading as often as not, accepted your piracy as a tribute to the merits of his merchandise. He was bent, and he was ancient; he was as grimy as his shop, and his parchment hands were browned like the leaves of the books he sold. But when a customer demanded a rare book, or, still better, when a customer put some nice point about the authenticity of an alleged first edition, the bookseller raised his crabbed face, and then you got the illumination.

Persons in search of impossible bargains confined their attention to the penny box, or went farther east than the Strand. Along Farringdon Road, along Aldgate, and somewhere in Shoreditch (I have forgotten where) there were stalls in plenty. Here, mostly, the books were heaped on the boards in magical confusion. When you dived your hand into the heap a current ran from the finger-tips up to the brain. When you had gripped something and brought it to light your catch was probably a volume of eighteenth-century sermons, or an odd duodecimo of the *Spectator*, the *Tatler*, the works of Alexander Pope, Dr. Johnson, or any old poet from Waller down to Wharton. You might have worse luck, and grab some modern trash already gone to ruin. You might have better luck, and find a pearl.

Some of these booksellers were just honest costermongers, who got their wares wholesale, and retailed them as they would cabbages. These men were your mark; it was their stalls the conscienceless bookman ravaged for the pearl of little price. But many of

the costermongers were not so simple as they looked; you found that not without reason were the books on this stall priced sixpence, on that stall more, or less. And here and there you found a stall with the books arranged in rows, and the price marked on the flyleaf, and a stallkeeper who had more than a tincture of bookish lore.

Aldgate has now no room and no mind for bookstalls; the Shoreditch mart, which was never much, has vanished; but there are still stalls with all the old magic about them in the Farringdon Road. There were always other stalls of odds and ends in Farringdon Road to dispute supremacy with the bookstalls, piled with broken ironwork, chains, hall lamps, door-knockers, knobs, locks, keys, bells, what not; and now flowers, fruit, and vegetables have usurped many of the old pitches. But the bookstalls are still there in the gutter of the pavement that runs along the grimy wall of the Underground station, and a volume of Tillotson's sermons may still be had for a few coppers.

Here are the siftings of many libraries—

job lots left over, when the more noticeable volumes have been auctioned by name, and sold at so much a pound. So that to-day you will find books with the plate of Cyrus Arbuthnot, to-morrow of Bertram Smyth; though, indeed, bookplates are by no means as common as they were. The books, too, run in cycles: to-day all sermons, to-morrow all plays and poems. There is something a little saddening in this literary post-mortem, something saddening in this casual exhibition of books that Cyrus Arbuthnot or Bertram Smyth once held so dear. Here, for instance, are the works of Horace, annotated, in the Latin tongue and a niggling little hand. Never, till they took Cyrus feet foremost away from his books, could that precious volume have been sold.

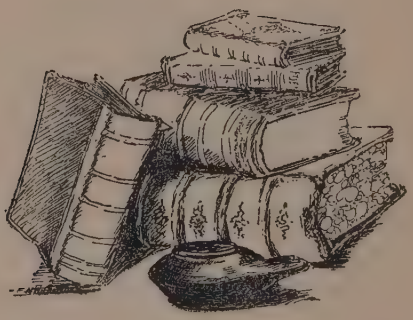
When the rookery of the Strand was swept away by Modern Improvement, some of the old booksellers died, some scattered; you will find them now in many odd corners of modern London. But most of them drifted, sooner or later, to Charing Cross Road. Here, struggling valiantly against the pressure

of alien business, through traffic of many foot-passengers and motor vehicles of monstrous shape and modernity, the ancient cult survives. But its stalls are masked with French novels, cheap reprints, gaudy picture-books. If you would recapture the fine flavour of old delights you must grub within. There, on the walls lined with books from floor to ceiling, you will find many a rare first edition; though, nowadays, the eighteenth-century has gone underground.

How old we grow! Why, here are first editions, unique examples, of books that were not written when first we went a-gathering. Is that why the shops seem so much less magical, as well as so much more spick and span than the old caverns of Holywell Street? Is that why the sons, heirs, and assigns of our old cronies seem so much more like business men and less like wizards? Yet even an ordinary bookshop has its fascinations, and any sort of second-hand bookshop is full of magical spells—unless, indeed, it specialises on school-books, and is ready to equip a young scholar with the tools of his

trade, only a little, and quite hopelessly, out of date.

Until the war destroyed all old values there was a wonderful pennyworth to be got, at times, in the Charing Cross Road. The booksellers knew their business, but they had lapses. Now the penny box is a wastepaper basket, and it is in the sixpenny box you grope for prizes. The writing-man gropes always with a painful tightness at the heart. Will he bring out one of his own offspring remaindered down to beggary? Such has been the ill fortune of the present writer. He felt inclined to offer the bookseller double his price.



XVII.—THE CINEMA

IT is a shabby street of the broader sort, packed with traffic, and lined with assorted shops.

From the front the cinema theatre looks like a pasteboard palace transported from Shepherd's Bush. Across it, in glaring capitals, sprawls its bill of fare—"featuring" Mary Pickford, perhaps; almost certainly Charlie Chaplin; and, to emphasise the fact, there is a picture of the pretty lady, or the comical fellow, plastered over the entrance, or on a board that leans against a festal column below. A tall and gorgeous commissionaire, hired mainly for display, commands the steps. These a crowd of customers is constantly ascending and descending, with a continual tinkle of metal as money and pass-in checks salute the metal counter of the box-office. Occasionally the commis-

sionaire shouts aloud a passionate or a side-splitting title—such as: "This afternoon, The Lure of Sin, in three parts, featuring . . ." Or, "Continual performance, Flossie's Frivolous Flutter."

The hour is early, and the crowd is of military age or under. The prevailing type seems to be the small boy in smeary cap and greasy trousers, smoking furiously at a cigarette gripped in the extreme corner of his mouth, rattling his money in his pocket, and swarming as to a scrum. The one word you catch for certain as he presses to the box-office is "Charlie." They are all faithful subjects of the young Pretender.

You pass through a door and a curtain, and are in almost absolute darkness. The only light is at the end of the room, where black-and-white figures are capering foolishly on the screen. Music of a mournful gaiety indicates the presence of a piano and a fiddle. You have the feeling that this has been going on since the beginning of time. A black shape collects before you, and flashes at you a flaming eye and a luminous hand.

The hand grabs your check, and a voice says sharply, "Stalls this way, please!" The shape drifts away, you following. You

are aware now of rows on rows of blackness, on either side of you, with a fugitive hint of faces that grows to a certainty as the drifting darkness halts, and flashes its luminous eye on a row of them. Stumbling over

stretched legs, you fall into an empty seat.

Here you are in an atmosphere of stuffiness, tobacco smoke, and vague mysterious voices, whispers, a treble giggle, a muted bass. And all the while, as in a nightmare, the meaningless pageant of the film parades.

Gradually you settle into your environment. Puffing at your pipe, all your senses except the sense of seeing are lulled to a drugged security. The eyes are drugged, too, yet wide open and straining — fascinated, hypnotised by the phantom pictures of the film.

The absurd legends do not make you laugh. In this mad world, "Maisie falls to it. Archibald is some boy," does not strike a discordant note. But now that you have the hang of the story, and are, as it were, a part of it, the voicelessness of the actors oppresses. You are much relieved when an overburdened female sufferer screams, "Look out! he's got a knife!" Then the house roars, and for a moment the atmosphere is homely and healthy; but the next minute the nightmare grips you again.

Wonderful things happen. There is an express train, with Maisie hanging on to the tail of it. There is Maisie dangling over a precipice and the villain hacking at her with a knife. There is Archibald catching a tameless steed, riding him through burning forests, over icy mountains, and finally falling with him down tall cliffs into a moonlit sea. There is pathos, too—Maisie and Archibald captured by gun-men, and torn from each other, he grinding his teeth, she weeping bitterly. And there is that great scene where Archibald, worn with torture and the loss of his meat-card, drags himself to the church just in time to prevent Maisie being forced into marriage to save the honour of her aged father. There is a sound of sniffling around you then.

At last "The Lure of Sin," in three parts (you have not seen even one part of it), is over, and the lights go up on a very strange assembly. The people sit bundled up in their seats, not yet half awake, their eyes blinking. A few couples still sit with arms interlaced, here and there a tired man or

woman, in shabby clothes, quietly sleeps. Attendants cry, "This way out!" Customers who have seen the round of the reels, and do not wish to see it again, respond to the invitation. Many of the boys, the cigarettes still in active eruption, are munching war-bread and margarine, and betting on Charlie for the next act.

Charlie indeed it is, and, when he bounds into view, you realise the artistic function of the cinema. It is to present Charlie. His walrus waddle, his sham catastrophes, his polite entanglements, his amiable idiocies, his infrequent sudden bursts of harlequin fury, the trap-door motion of his saluting hat, the incomparable shuttle of his eye over his toothbrush moustache—all these things had necessarily to be part of a dumb show, and could only rise to their true pitch of extravagant impishness when Charlie had been squeezed to a black-and-white phantom on a screen. As a popular amusement the cinema lives on Charlie.

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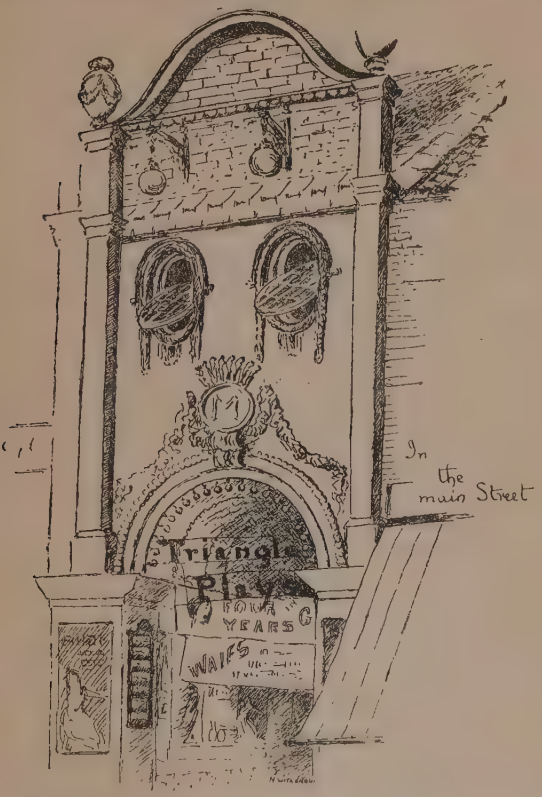
We are farther west now, and the theatre

has other airs. It advertises itself, but in a more reticent fashion. Its portico is more



magnificent, and the commissionaire stands in a carpeted foyer.

When you have entered the well-appointed

theatre the lights are up, and the spectators look very like those you see at the play. But they are bored. In spite of the quite delightful music played by the orchestra, boredom stares out of nearly every face in balcony and stall. They have not come to a festival, they come to get doped.

The film is a fine one—a medley of many periods. Vast crowds manœuvre in vast spaces, in colossal temples and palaces decked with monstrous idols or Christian monuments. There are fierce battles, desperate attacks and surprises. The drama is nothing, but the spectacle is grandiose. It is not as fine as *Charley's Aunt*, but it is better than Reinhardt.

Yet even this oppresses. For the spectacle has no dramatic significance. It is meant to overcome you with the "muchness" of it. You read in letters of fire across the screen: "This film cost £200,000 to produce."

When you are out in the street again you take a deep breath. The carnal, common life is so dignified and fine.

XVIII.—THE PARKS

PIERRE LOTI, who came to London prepared to find an arid desert, admitted that he had never visited so leafy a metropolis. And this is a true bill. Not even gay Paris, for all her leafy boulevards, can compare with the billowy greenness of our disgruntled city. Faithful to our pose of shamefaced reticence, we strive to hide the fact from the casual visitors, and present them with many streets of baked and dusty pavements and implacable plate-glass shop-fronts. But this is a trick, and everywhere, just out of eyeshot, calm trees are waving over great green spaces. Even in the multitudinous congregation of the necessary inconvenient poor there are intervals of greenness, there is one large lapse to grace. As for the West End, well, that clusters round a passionate hiatus. The back windows of the bureaucracy look

upon St. James's Park, though there is a parade ground in between. The fashionable street for millionaires is Park Lane. The centre of London, of the London "that matters," is Hyde Park—so called, no doubt, because it is the one park we cannot hide.

St. James's Park is a promise—no more. But if you will be content to sit by the lake (when it is a lake and not the floor of a boiler-room) and watch its naive assumption of an endless Western perspective, and watch the strange water-fowl hovering round the island, and note how regally the landscape mounts before you to waving plumes and a summit of stone palaces, there, more than elsewhere in London, shall you have an intimate touch of greenness, shall the shy birds sing for you alone.

Hyde Park has its diverse moments, its contradictory moods. At such an early hour as this, even on so fine a summer morning, its drives and paths are deserted, save by a few soldiers on leave walking out their best girls. Deserted, too, is the greensward, but for some strays of the night who have found free

lodging there, or have drifted in at the opening of the gates. Or, stay! there are other figures, small, ragged, and noisy, yet almost too swift to be noticed, rushing pell-mell by any route, and then down a steep place to the Serpentine.

Having passed the impertinent Marble Arch stranded forlornly on its island, having crossed the broad expanse of grass littered with its padlocked wooden rest-huts, through an openwork of tree trunks you spy the lake, and on the farther side of it a crowd of small boys in a frenzy of undressing. Here and there a white shape hopping gingerly along the shore, or splashing in the shallows, here and there the head of a bold swimmer adventuring the depths. A background of green slope and leafy branches, topped by imperious, distant walls.

Circling the lake at your leisure, and smoking a pipe, maybe, on the slope of the farther bank within sight of the merry business, prepare yourself for the urbanities of the Row! Right and left of you, between tall trees, stretches the quiet, warm brown

breadth of it, fading to a silvery vista. Galloping towards you, noiselessly at first, then with a soft, swift pound of hoof, comes a centaur, the breath of the morning about its tossing head—another and another; they fly past you, poised in the air as by a miracle. Most of the male riders are officers; many of the women are breeched, but those in flying habit and prim bowler have your suffrage.

As the sun mounts over the trees the crowd of riders lessens, and the crowd of fine-feathered strollers beside the Row increases. One rider or another halts at a hail, and leans over the railing with a raised hat.

And now the carriage-ways round about are full of whizzing wheels, the sparkle and jingle of harness, and the clatter of hoofs. In these petrol-less days, and until a Controller expunges him, the horse has come again to his own. There is that change in the Park; and there is the show of khaki. But, though you have heard of the levelling influence of the war, you will find no change in the faces of those who ride and drive.

Well-bred insolence sits as securely there as ever.

In the evening the Park belongs to the

people. The benches along the carriage-ways are packed. Along all the footways there is a thick stream of passengers, a medley of all classes. The penny chairs on the grass are mostly tenanted, mixed couples wander at

large. There are boats on the Serpentine, their long tentacles clawing up fire from the reluctant water. Your eye follows their progress until they dodge behind an island, reappear again, and at last vanish under a high swing-bridge. Through the bridge peeps fairyland—Kensington Gardens. And thither, though the band is piping up, and the drift of darkening shapes and light laughter between the bandstand and the trees has the urge of romance, thither you go. For Kensington Gardens have a magic all their own. Not the formal garden, for all its placid pavement, comfortable urns, and decorous basins; not the somewhat inconclusive monument to Peter Pan and the memories of Barrie it invokes; not even the silver Serpentine here so snugly embossed, but something derived from and inspiring all these things makes the Gardens a haunt of fairies hiding in the casual thicket and footing it across the proud, broad, grassy alleys. Alas! Hardly have the fairies come out for their twilight revels when the Gardens are closed, and the

myriad nursemaids must hurry their charges home.

A spirit of contrariness takes you to Hyde Park again to listen to that antidote of magic —the orator on the stump. Whatsoever cause you will is here maligned and betrayed by an over-zealous supporter. A portable rostrum with a flaming apostle upon it, a crowd fiercely contentious at the heart, bored or indifferent or mildly amused at the outskirts. Fiscal Reform, Prison Reform, Divorce Law Reform, Pacifism, Imperialism, Free Thought, Higher Thought, Vegetarianism, Teetotalism —the gamut of opinion is spanned. And there, almost without an audience, an elderly gentleman in a topper quotes Bible texts, and urges you to flee from the wrath to come. If, nevertheless, you come of a Sunday you will find more of him, more of all of them, more flaming than ever, and as ineffectual.

Victoria Park has its groves and glades and flowers, but it is more a playing field than a pleasance. Of a week-a-daytime it is almost a solitude. But of an evening and on Saturday afternoon, in peace-time at least,

the crack of the cricket bat on ball sounds in replicated volleys all along the line of pitches, white or drab figures fly between wickets, and blown fieldsmen dance attendance on a well-placed drive or cut. At all times the Park is quieter now, except when the inevitable manœuvre is toward, or the Boy Scout anticipates his prime. But the sandpit is as popular as ever, both with the children digging pits and building castles, and the diligent insects that have made it their permanent address.

Regent's Park is an indeterminate quantity. Perhaps the contiguity of the Zoo and the Botanical Gardens have dwarfed it to its character of an appendix. Perhaps the variety of its boundary neighbourhoods has cast a doubt on its status. Anyhow, it had an air of the shabby genteel until bristling battalions made it their own.

Battersea Park has no real existence, except as a back garden for flats, and Greenwich Park is only a ghost lamenting its lost grandeur. As for Waterlow Park and the rest of the smaller fry, here Nature is put in a pot and watered. You have no more

reason to include them in your survey than the countless recreation grounds and nondescript green nooks, wedged here and there and everywhere, among factories, and stolen, mostly, from the dead.

XIX.—THE ZOO

WALKING in Regent's Park, at the far north end of it, you will sometimes hear wails, squeals, and roarings as of Dante's damned; and looking round for the cause, your eye will light on cages and paddocks behind a stout, obscuring fence, but topped, starkly enough, by some penny-gaff mountains, maybe with a quadruped silhouetted above their impossible slopes. In the early morning there are but few calls from the captives in the Zoo; and this morning, more than another, finds them silent. You fancy them still sleeping from last night's air raid, if not just sulky at having their best vocal explosions outdone. The holiday crowd pressing with you through the southern entrance is far more voluble.

So reticent are the captives that you

hardly notice them until you come to the house of the great cats. These are personalities, and compel attention: whether they

walk or watch they hold the stage. And here, for the first time, you get that agreeable little thrill which is the prime pleasure of the Zoo—the thrill of deadly danger

safely caged. Here is a dark mass of leopard slapped on a branch, nothing alive in it save the sombre, sly eyes steadfastly regarding you. Here is a fierce cat padding about and about. Here is a gorgeously striped tiger, huge and wicked, walking round the narrow stage, a glint of red in its angry, cruel, watchful eye. One tiger, though, understudies his cousin, the lion, and sits massively with crossed paws, and an air of inward meditation.

Cousins they may be, yet the lion looks quite otherwise. You gather that religion and language are far more important than race. Here, in the open (behind bars, shy reader, and thick ones), high up on a balcony, lounge a few tawny lionesses, wide awake, and face full at you, but loftily indifferent to your holiday stare. Plump against the bars a couple perambulate hither and forth, like ship's officers on a quarter-deck. Their steady glance travels over you. What do they see? Why, a huge lion, spare-bodied below his royal mane, who, with forefeet on a rock, slowly yawns and

stretches himself. The big eyelids lift like iron curtains from his calm, courageous eyes. The great red mouth closes calmly; the great square-hewn face is indomitably calm. That the face of a cat? What fools these scientists be!

Clumsy-looking bison, yet with an avalanche-threat (one butts brutally at you as you pause), gay parrots, a mournful black wyddah bird, with her weeds at the wrong end of her—these you notice as you walk with a growing crowd and in a growing heat to the monkey-house. Persons anxious to confute the wilder heresies of the evolutionists should go straight from the lion to the monkey. They will realise, then, how much more like the lion we are than the ape. The place is packed, and roaring, but the roar is from the crowd. Glancing over heads and through the bars you see a triple frieze of grinning faces and a monkey

skipping from side to side and chattering angrily at a dodging wisp of paper. At last he captures it, and, squatting, slowly tears to pieces and devours the cause of dispute. Three great ourang-outangs are bunched in lazy lumps. One of them looks the very image of an Irishman. In the same cage a heap of straw stirs near the bars, and there looks out at you a black face with a tiny spark in the eyes. One small beast is cracking nuts for a wager; other beasts leap, hang, and gibber; others hunt with absurd intentness for fleas.

And now the heat is intense, the crowd is impossibly great, and Mappin's terraces look delusively cool and inviting. A delusion indeed! for when you have bullied your way there you find the crowd thicker than ever, and the poor Polar bears are sweltering on arid rock. Other bears, begging for provender, look more happy. One huge fellow, up-ended, with wagging paws, persuades you that he is supported entirely by voluntary contributions. Another clasps his feet in his hands to make a lap for offerings, and

grins contentedly. Another lies luxuriously on the flat of his back, and has hardly the energy to bend for a nut that falls on his fur.

The mountain slopes are all but vacant. Two mountain goats sit folded up at the mouth of a cave; one brave fellow stands on the verge of a toy precipice, head and horns uplifted, and vainly sniffs the heavy air for a hint of mountain savour.

On the promenade below the terraces holiday-makers cluster thick. Fagged parents, carrying and trailing countless progeny, come to an anchor, and undo luncheon parcels. There is a noticeable lack of khaki. Doesn't the Army come to the Zoo? Or are there fewer soldiers on leave?

The reptile-house is out of the question—except for a quick run through. All the snakes, from python down the gamut, are

motionless curled lengths of jointed metal. The crocodiles and alligators sham dead, though one of them has made the mistake of leaving his teeth disclosed.

After that it is a relief to watch the sea lions showing off—turning an elegant fin as they side-step, or tearing along at racing speed with high-raised prow.

The jackals are mean-looking beasts. You can see their snub noses and nasty teeth busy with garbage. But the wolves, especially the whitish, light-footed timber-wolf, have some of the nobility of the dog. Though you set them an example, the hyenas—nasty beasts, too!—refuse to laugh.

Past endless aviaries, with manifold birds hopping and twittering, you come to a vast plain, an encampment. Crowds of people are on the hot grass. Crowds of people press into and out of hot tea-places. Crowds of hot people lag along the footways. There is a sound of teeth munching and children squalling. Very gratefully you subside into a crowded but cooler tunnel—that has a

stout bar across, to stay the rush of the elephants, so you are told, if, in an air raid, the creatures go mad and break loose.

And the elephants are your mark now, though many lively mammals—monkeys, squirrels, what not—and many gaudy parrots seek to detain you. But it is not an elephant you see first when you enter his lordship's house. A great, long, red mouth gapes at you from under a flabby upper lip. You are astonished and shocked when the mouth closes to find it belongs to an impervious armour-plated hippopotamus. But the elephant next door is better game. He is on good terms with the crowd. He knows you, and humours you; he curls his trunk for your pleasure, squirts water on an inquisitive boy, and then suddenly forgets all about you, and turns his wrinkled wall of a body sideways, though you are conscious of a cunning twinkle in his small, keen eye.

Another cage yet, and you are before an elephant who wears an air of expectation. He walks his legs loosely to and fro, like the legs of a half-pay major. He looks up

at a tower of a saddle hung before his cage, and wonders what is the delay. The delay is not long. Presently the crowd forms in front of you, and you divine, rather than see, that the beast has stepped out of his cage. Jumping on to a seat, and looking out of a window, you get a full view of Jumbo minimus solemnly sinking to the earth to have the saddle fitted on his back. When you reach the door he is slouching firmly past, followed by a whoop of small boys. When next you see him there is a quiet cluster of them on his back, and the lions have started roaring.

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